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Vol. IV.

Complete
In One Number.

Beadle & Adams, Publishers,
No. 98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Price,
Ten Cents.

No. 46.

Bowie-Knife Ben, The Little Hunter of the Nor'-West;

OR,

The Exiles of the Valley of Shadows.

BY OLL COOMES,
AUTHOR OF "DAKOTA DAN," "OLD DAN RACK-
BACK," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE PHANTOM OF THE STORM.

"WHAT say you, Chris, Larry, Martin and Cloudy?—shall we go on across the prairie in s'arch of the boy? or shall we p'int noses to'ards the lake?" asked Bowie-knife Ben, determined to settle the question which had been under consideration all day.

"In the face of this storm I think it will be utterly impossible to cross the open plain," responded Chris Proctor, a handsome, dark-eyed man of some five and twenty years of age.



"Arrah, now, me b'ys," exclaimed Larry O'Ray, a young Irishman, "and it's a dooty we owe the b'y to go and hunt him up, so it is, bedad."

"There's not a doubt but that Nathan's in the power of the red-skins," added Martin Sawyer; "and by keepin' right on north'ards, we might save him from death."

"Dat am dis chile's vardict," chimed in a sable-skinned son of Africa, known as Cloudy Tom.

"There," said Bowie-knife Ben, "that decides the question. The majority say go on, and go on it is."

The little party of hunters, for such the five men were, stood within the shadows of one of those great pine forests of Minnesota, and within twenty steps of the southern extremity of a great trackless prairie over which a fearful snow-storm was then raging in unrestrained fury. When the party left the settlement to which its members belonged, it numbered six persons. Under the leadership of the noted scout and hunter, Bowie-knife Ben, they had set out upon a hunting excursion, anticipating great success and much sport. In the forest bordering the Sauk river, they pitched their tent and began their work, in the midst of which one of their number, Nathan Reeve, suddenly disappeared. Hostile Indians being in the country, it was soon discovered that he had fallen into their power. At least, this was the general supposition since Ben had discerned his tracks among those of a number of savages; and, as Nathan was one of the most loyal and devoted youths upon the border, no one could think otherwise than that he had been taken away an unwilling captive.

The party had followed the trail of the savages to within two miles of the prairie, when a heavy snow-storm coming on, soon obliterated every sign of their course; but, naturally supposing that the red-skins were aiming for their village, the pursuers kept on northward, and reached the prairie just as night set in. And it was here that they came to a halt to consult before plunging out into the open plain. It was a dangerous trip that lay before them, and as young Proctor had objected to attempting it before morning, Bowie-knife Ben resolved to leave it to the party, whose decision we have already given. The life of Nathan Reeve was an object paramount to the dangers of the kind-hearted bordermen, and with the question settled, Bowie-knife Ben led the way out into the open plain and howling storm, followed by his four companions.

"Howly Mother!" exclaimed Larry O'Ray, as the wind hurled the blinding snow into his eyes and face. "And how this jade av a shstorm raves and fla'nts her ragged skirts in my face!"

"A wild night, a wild night, my boys," replied Bowie-knife Ben; "but what's a little snow and wind compared with the life of as brave and noble a youth as Nathan Reeve?"

"It's sensible yer talking now, me lauky, for if Nat should be lost, where in all Lakeside would be as sad a heart as that av Miss Willma's? It's she that loves the lad with all her swate young soul; and a sorry toime it'd be at the skating carnival to-morrow night, if Nathan is not there to cut the name of his darlint on the ice—Howly Mother! and what is that?"

The little party, already white with the driven snow, came to a sudden halt, for upon the wings of the storm came a strange sound to their ears—a sound like the subdued coughing of a great engine laboring to move its ponderous works. It was so faint, however, that they could not determine the course from whence it came, and the darkness and whirling snow prevented them from seeing a rod away. But, as they continued to listen, the sound was repeated; and this time it was nearer, and accompanied by the craunch, craunch of the crispy snow, as if it was being trodden by giants' feet.

"What is it, anyhow, Ben?" asked Chris Proctor, in a subdued tone, which betrayed some sudden emotion.

Ben made no reply, but lifting his hand he pointed toward the shadowy outlines of a giant form that appeared from out the gloom—swept a past them as if upon the breath of the storm, and disappeared in the direction of the woods.

"Good Lord! what was it?" exclaimed Proctor.

"What was it?" repeated Ben, betraying some emotion; "didn't you see?"

"I saw a giant shadow, not unlike a man in form, but what else could it have been but a mystic freak of the storm?"

"Don't let your fears get the best of you, Chris. I saw the shadowy form—we all saw it. We heard his footsteps

in the snow, and we heard that unearthly cough; and when he passed us, I see'd him shake his grizzled form like a spaniel just out of the river."

"Ay, b'ys, and I tell ye phat it war a dimon, and it's scarce we'd betther be making av ourselves in this place. I swaney, he war ten feet hoigh, he was, and his legs war as long as me body, be gorry they war."

Superstition asserted its influence upon the bordermen in a manner not to be mistaken; and Bowie-knife Ben, brave as a lion in the very face of material dangers, now shuddered with some vague horror, while his friends gathered around him, and spoke in quick, excited tones of the phantom giant that had passed them.

There for several minutes they stood, with the storm raving around them, but at length their fears subsided, and they were about to resume their journey, when a shrill, startling cry issued from out the depths of the forest, a little east of where they had left it.

"Tarnal furies! what's that mean?" growled Bowie-knife Ben. "I guess all the ghosts and goblins of creation are rantin' around to-night."

"Och, bedad! and there goes another yel—lp!" cried O'Ray.

"Ah, that was an Injin's yell," replied Ben, with a sudden start, "an', by Judas, there's a light off yander in the woods!"

Through the storm and gloom, the faint glimmer of a light could be seen back in the forest, not a great distance to the right of where they had debouched into the plain.

"Like as any way, boys," said Ben, "the red varlets that got Nathan are camped yander, and so let's slide back and inquire into it."

So saying, the stumpy figure of the trapper glided away toward the woods, closely followed by his companions. The snow was quite deep—there having been a previous heavy fall—but the hunters being provided with snow-shoes, they were enabled to move quite rapidly.

They soon gained the cover of the forest again, where the wind did not blow. But slowly down through the network of bows overhead softly fell the great crystal flakes, loading limb and bush and muffling the crispy air.

Keeping the light before them, the party moved on, until Ben finally ordered a halt. They were not far from the camp-fire, yet they could not see the campers, nor could they tell who they were. Leaving his companions to await his return, Ben glided softly forward to reconnoiter. He moved with the silence and ease of a cat, and yet he was of a build in which one would scarcely look for grace of movement. In fact, Bowie-knife Ben was one of those human monstrosities called dwarfs. He was not over four feet and a half in height, with a short, thick-set body, broad, massive shoulders, and a short, stout neck, upon which was set a perfectly-shaped head. There was, however, nothing repulsive about this man, who was in the very prime of life. On the contrary, he was an agreeable companion. His features were intellectual and symmetrical in their outline, and wore an odd, pleasant expression that seemed to forestall an outburst of jollity and good-naturedness, and thereby kept his companions in a state of lively expectancy. His physical strength was prodigious, and his agility and power of endurance were like those of the fox-hound.

In circumventing the red skins he seemed to have an especial liking; and it was an art in which he had no equal on the border. In the use of the bowie-knife—his favorite weapon, and of which he always carried half a dozen bristling in his girdle—he was as skillful as an East India juggler. Every time he could plant the point of a bowie-knife within an iron circle, whose diameter would admit of the width of the blade, at the distance of twenty yards, and never touch the edge; and many a red-skin had fallen dead with a knife plunged into his breast by the hand of the unseen foe, over two rods away. Hence the name, Bowie-knife Ben.

The scout was dressed in a style peculiar to the border, with the exception of his cap, which was a curious invention of his own. It resembled a small pyramid with a portion of the top or apex cut off. It was open at the top, and from the sides two small iron hooks projected a little way through the fur with which the whole was covered.

Creeping forward, the scout soon came in sight of the camp-fire, around which he could see a dozen shadowy forms, sitting and standing. They were Indians. This he had no difficulty in determining, and a little to one side of the group he beheld the object of his search, Nathan Reeve.

He was a captive, true enough, and stood bound to a large tree, and in a position that could not have been otherwise than painful.

The Indians appeared to be consulting on some important measure, judging from their furtive glances and violent gestures; and for full thirty minutes Ben remained quiet, watching their movements. They seemed to be entirely unapprehensive of danger, and yet they betrayed an uneasiness that Ben could not account for. By this time, however, the camp-fire had burned quite low, and the want of more "light on the subject" seemed to have diverted the attention of the savages from the main question, and two of the warriors were dispatched into the woods in quest of fuel. This, the reader may think, was difficult to obtain with two feet of snow on the ground, but in such cases the Indian and hunter have recourse to other fuel than that usually found upon the earth. Among the lower branches of most all large trees there are many dead, dry limbs still adhering to the trunk, and these can be easily procured.

The two Indians left camp in opposite directions, one of them coming directly toward Bowie-knife Ben. The scout, seeing his danger, began a hasty, yet silent retreat. Under a large tree he came to a stand, and a few moments later he discovered that the Indian was following him. He was certain that he had not been discovered, but supposed the warrior was coming to the tree to look for dead boughs.

The scout did not continue his retreat, but removing his snow-shoes and laying them aside with his rifle, he concealed himself behind the tree to await the approach of the unsuspecting warrior.

Having reached the tree, the Indian broke off a number of dry limbs and was about to return to camp, when something, cold and icy as the fingers of death, closed upon his throat with the deadly grasp of the constrictor. A brief and silent struggle ensued there in the deep snow that served as a muffler to all violent blows and falls, and which soon became crimson with the life-blood of one of the combatants.

The Indians at camp waited patiently for the return of the two warriors, while their camp-fire waxed and waned lower and lower until it scarcely emitted a glow. Half an hour went by, and still neither of the warriors returned.

"Sleepy-Deer and Big Wolf must have gone far for wood," said the chief of the band, speaking in his own vernacular, which we translate. "Our fire wants fuel—the falling snow is slowly putting it out, and the storm raves. We must have fire."

"Maybe Sleepy-Deer and Big Wolf lost," replied a comrade.

"Lost!" repeated the chief, half-disdainfully; "can a Sioux brave get lost in the woods where he has hunted the deer since he was a child?"

"The friends of that dog of a pale-face may be around," said a warrior, turning to Nathan.

"Sleepy-Deer is coming!" exclaimed the chief, as the soft craunch of approaching footsteps was heard.

Then from out the shadows of the gloom appeared a figure wrapped to the chin in a great, dirty scarlet blanket, and bearing in his arms a load of dry branches. A glance at his face and half-closed eyes told that it was Sleepy-Deer, and but for the partial gloom they might have detected blood upon his face and blanket.

With measured pace he approached the camp, and deposited his load upon the heap of red coals. A volume of sparks floated upward among the descending flakes of snow, accompanied by a lurid flash. Then followed an almost total darkness in consequence of the fuel covering the coals. But as the fire gained strength, the murmur of the savages' voices grew louder, and the snow seemed to fall thicker and faster, while the wind shrieked fiercer above the tree-tops.

In five minutes the limbs were ablaze. A ruddy light burst suddenly forth and lit up the surrounding gloom, and brought to the savages' eyes a sight that blanched their cheeks with amazement and horror. Nathan Reeve, their captive, was gone, and so was the body of Sleepy-Deer. But from a limb of the tree before them hung a ghastly object swaying to and fro. It was the decapitated head of the warrior whose body had disappeared! The eyes were half-closed as they were in life, but seemed glaring upon the astounded warriors as if to reproach them of their blind stupidity.

A cry burst from the lips of the chief, and from lip to lip passed the question: "Who has slain our friend?"

"I'm ther lark that sung the song!" came an answering

voice from a clump of bushes hard by the camp; and at the same instant something vivid shot across the space between the bushes and the chief, and the latter fell heavily to the earth, clutching wildly at the haft of a knife driven deep into his breast by the never-failing hand of Bowie-knife Ben.

"Bowie-knife! Bowie-knife!" burst in fierce accents from the lips of the savages, and in a minute, cries of vengeance thrilled through the forest.

CHAPTER II.

THE LOST TRAIL OF TITAN.

SWIFT as a deer Bowie-knife Ben went dancing away through the darkness and storm, going in a direction that brought him back to the tree where he had concealed his rifle and snow-shoes. Securing the weapon and shoes, he hastened on and soon came to where he had left his friends. To his great joy and relief he found that Nathan Reeve had found them, and was already narrating to his companions the manner in which he had been liberated by one of his captors, much to his surprise and wonder.

The youth had never suspected the true source of his escape, so quickly and silently had it been effected; notwithstanding, his liberator had whispered, and told him the direction in which to look for his companions when his bonds were cut. He never dreamed that it was the daring and fearless Bowie-knife Ben who had rescued him by resorting to a ghastly stratagem; for his short, thick body was concealed by the Indian's blanket, which reached from the top of his cap to the ground, while the ghastly head of Sleepy-Deer sitting upright, and in proper position, on the top of his peculiarly-arranged cap, gave the required light to the form. The partial darkness concealed all imperfections in the horrible disguise; although the very boldness of the trick itself was sufficient to allay suspicion.

"What! Holy Moses! has the boy escaped?" exclaimed Ben, in apparent astonishment at the young man's presence among his friends; "has Nat—Nathan Reeve—escaped from the red hounds of 'Fiddler's Green'?"

"I'm here, Ben; thanks to one of my captors," replied young Reeve.

"Indeed!—but see here, boys: we've no time to talk now—the red knaves are on the rampage, so let's shove."

Suiting the action to the word, the scout turned and began shoving his snow-shoes over the crispy snow in long, rapid strides, closely followed by his five companions. They shaped their course southward, and like dusky phantoms they went speeding on—flitting in and out among the shadows, gliding here and dodging there, to evade contact with the boughs that were low bending under their crystal load.

They had journeyed nearly a mile in this manner when a dark object lying upon the snow before them, arrested the attention of the redoubtable Bowie-knife Ben. A halt was ordered, and the scout crept forward toward the object. When it was reached, he found it was the lifeless body of Big Wolf, one of the warriors sent out from camp in search of fuel. He was stone dead, yet the body was not entirely cold. There was no wound nor blood upon him that was visible, nor were there any signs about of his having been struggling with a foe. The scout saw, however, that the warrior's eyes protruded from their sockets, and that his tongue, also, extended beyond his lips in a manner that told he had been strangled to death. And this was verified by further examination of the body. The indentations of huge fingers were found upon the throat on each side of the larynx; and no sooner had Ben made this discovery than he sprung away from the body and began searching the ground with his head bent low like a hound.

"Oho! it's jist as I expected, boys," suddenly burst from his lips, "and by the saints of old, we've got to look a leetle out. Come this way, boys—there—stoop down. Do you see that?"

He pointed to a track in the snow that must have been made with a giant's foot, for no human track of its size had ever been seen by the party before.

"What does it mean, Ben?" asked young Reeve, and his question was repeated by his companions.

"Ay, boys," replied Ben, starting up, "it is the track of Titan, the Terror of the North."

"A fabled giant, I daresay," laughed young Proctor, who, as well as Nathan Reeve, was a man of some little education.

"Och, bedad!" exclaimed O'Ray, "and who knows but it's the track av that shlammin' big shadder phat we sene upon the pe-rarry awhoile ago, eh, now?"

"That's comin' right to the point, Larry," said Ben; "that war no shadder we see'd—I know it now; it war the figure of Titan hisself."

"And, pray, who is Titan?" asked Nathan.

"Thar you've flummixed me, boy. I've never met any one who knows who Titan are, more'n that he's a giant that some say's ten feet high, though I can't say to that, for I never had a good sight of him, even in the night. He used to be up on the Red river, and the last time I heard of him he war down on the Chippewa, playin' thunder among the ducks. Every thing human on the Chip. war afraid of him. Men carried their rifles in the field with 'em, for rumors come down from the Red river country and said he'd catch men out alone and strangle 'em. The weemen kept a pot of hot water to douse on him and scald him if he kem around, and the children—well, every shadder they see'd, night or day, war Titan comin' to eat 'em; and all sich bosh as that. The fact is, he never killed a white man, stole a woman, or eat a baby as any one knowed of. But he's ole persimmons on red-skins and renegades. Some call him Centaur—half hoss and half man—but I don't b'lieve it. But I do b'lieve he's either a wild man, or Satan, or some strange feller that is conscious of his power to terrify and keeps it up jist fur the fun of it. But, they do say, his trail can't be follered, deep and plain as his tracks may be. But I can't chaw that, boys; and if ever I come across his trail after this, I'll show ye that Bowie-knife Ben's not to be sneezed at. But, lads, time is time, and we'd better be follerin' our noses to'rs camp. It's a long ways to the Sauk river, yet."

Without further delay the party resumed its journey again, moving on in silence, their minds filled with vague, weird thoughts, conjured up by the adventures of the night and the mystic influence of the storm. For long hours they held sharply on their way, and at length debouched into a plain, where a glorious sight met their view. The storm had long since cleared away, and the stars were twinkling, bright and crisp, in the blue dome of heaven; while the moon, in its third quarter, looked radiant to earth, upon whose bosom lay the spotless robe of winter—glimmering in the light like a sea of molten silver.

For a moment the party paused on the edge of the plain; and having made sure no enemy was in sight, they pushed on—not a sound breaking the silence of the night, save that eternal craunch, craunch of the dry, crispy snow under the shuffling feet of the hunters.

Fearless of dangers, they press on. Two miles of open plain will again bring them into the forest. But before half this distance is made, they come to a halt. The keen, restless eyes of Bowie-knife Ben have discovered some impression in the snow. A glance tells him it is a human track—the huge track of Titan, the Terror.

"Hi! thar's that monster's track again!" the scout exclaimed; "and it's been made since the storm ended—not many minutes ago. I tell you, boys, that critter's keepin' ahead of us—shadowin' us for some purpose or other, now mind."

"Howly Vargin!" cried Larry, "and maybe he's after squazin' our throttles like he did the red-skin's. Bad 'cess to the bloody big spaldeen if he lays hands on Larry O'Ray, for devil the bit will mees hesitate to shoot when me blood gits so hot that it blubbers in me veins, begorra!"

"Somehow or other," said Nathan Reeve, "I can have no great fears of this reputed giant. On the contrary, I would like to know something more about him, and am willing to follow his trail!"

"Foller thunder and lightnin', Nathan!" blurted Bowie-knife Ben; "can we foller the devil himself?"

"I daresay a great many persons follow his Satanic majesty without track or trail," replied Nathan, his handsome, boyish face lighting up with a smile. "But the feet that made that track must be of great size—twenty inches in length, I should judge. What say you all to following it—inasmuch as it is going nearly our course?"

"I'm not the man to back water, Nat," said Bowie-knife Ben.

"Nor I," "Nor dis chile," "Nor mees, bedad," responded

the others; whereupon they set off, following the trail of the unknown giant.

They moved on quite rapidly, for daylight could not have made the trail much plainer. Each man carried his rifle at a trail, as though he feared the unnatural being would spring suddenly upon them from a snow-drift, or some other covert; and as they moved on, conscious that each step brought them nearer the reputed giant, a vague fear arose in each breast—a fear that they could not shake off, but like the *ignis-fatua*, led them on with a strange fascination.

Bowie-knife Ben was in the lead, and when they had journeyed something near a mile, the scout came to a sudden halt, and an exclamation burst from his lips.

The trail they were following had come to an abrupt termination!

Surprise was written on every face.

There was a great hole in the snow where the trail ended, which looked as though the giant might have lain down there to rest. But nowhere around could the continuation of the trail be found. From that point the giant had vanished, leaving no trace of the manner in which he had gone. The snow was deep enough for a man to have burrowed himself under it, and so a bit of a mystery was imposed upon the party.

"What does it mean?—who can tell?" asked Nathan Reeve, in a tone betraying surprise.

"Ah! who indeed?" repeated Ben, with a dubious shake of the head.

CHAPTER III.

THE HUNTERS IN CAMP.

UNABLE to solve the mystery of the lost trail of the giant, our friends moved on, and in less than an hour reached the camp. This was located in the edge of the Sauk river timber, at the head of a small bayou, and consisted of but a single large tent, constructed of heavy oiled canvas.

To the joy of the party, they found that the game they had left suspended in the trees outside, and also their sleighs, had not been disturbed by prowling red-skins. The tent was just as they had left it, with the exception of being half buried in an immense snowdrift. The wind, during the recent storm, had had full sweep up the bayou, and, where suddenly checked by its fringe of dense forest, had piled up immense drifts of snow, in the midst of which stood the camp.

Floundering through the snow, the party opened the tent and entered. All was darkness within, but, being supplied with the means for a fire, a light was soon struck. This showed them that all was in its place in the tent. Their blankets, skins and other trappings, including a pair of skates to each one, were as they had been left—a discovery that gave great relief, for they really expected to find their camp in the power of the enemy.

They did not strike a fire, the air having risen to a milder temperature since the storm had ended. Besides, their recent vigorous exercise had warmed their blood to a degree that made them comfortable without fire. Rest and food were all that were desired now, and these they could obtain within their tent.

They felt no apprehensions of danger, for, owing to the stormy condition of the fore part of the night, most all of the Indians had doubtless been driven to quarters which they would likely maintain till morning. At least, this was the supposition to which our friends trusted for their safety.

After having partaken of a sumptuous meal drawn from their larder, of broiled venison, roasted turkey and "corn-pone," pipes were loaded, positions of ease assumed, and all gave way to the silent enjoyment of a "general smoke." The tent was soon filled with the fumes of the weed, and this, added to the partial gloom of the lodge, made it appear like a dense fog at evening twilight. The faces of the hunters became lost to each other behind the veil of smoke that poured from each mouth, for when a hunter indulges in a pipe after a long abstinence, he puffs vigorously; and the enjoyment of the luxury seems to be in proportion to the amount of smoke emitted from his lips—the more smoke, the more pleasure. Their minds, so severely exercised during the night, now became drowsy under the slumberous, intoxicating influence of the narcotic. Strange visions passed before their passive minds, and a deep silence brooded over

all. But at length a voice almost sepulchral, came from out the depths of the cloud within the tent, saying:

"Howly Mother! phy don't some av yees shpeak out, or the tent'll be full av shpoons and goblins? Tell us if yees don't think this is solid enjoyment—much swater than ran-in' around 'mong red-skins and giants?"

"Who sed dat it wasn't, Irishman?" asked Cloudy Tom.

"Humph!" ejaculated Bowie-knife Ben, "this is not a bad night. Many a wuser one I've slept under the snow."

"Under the snow?" exclaimed Chris Proctor, in apparent surprise; "how could a man keep from freezing and suffocating for want of air?"

"Very easy, Chris," replied Ben, "and ag'in' you've spent as many winters in the North as I have, you'll know somethin' 'bout it, mebby. Why, it's actually warm under a snow-bank, and you wouldn't smother if ye war twenty feet under. But ye want to be well wrapped up, so's the snow can't touch the skin, for the heat of yer body'll melt it. Yes, sir-ee; it's jist as easy to do it as fallin' off the fence, and I'll bet more'n one Ingin's snoozin' away like a b'ar, out on the pe-rarry, to-night."

"Well, I don't think I'd like to try it, unless compelled to do that or worse," said Chris.

"I don't doubt that it can be done, singular as it may seem," replied Nathan Reeve.

Thus conversation was resumed, and the pipes discarded for the time being. The smoke soon cleared from the tent; then Ben replenished the torch, which at once gave forth a stronger light.

With that precaution which becomes second nature to a borderman of experience, Bowie-knife Ben ran his keen eyes around the tent, as if to see that all was in its proper place, But no sooner had he made the circuit of the lodge with his vision, than he started slightly, at the same time inquiring:

"Boys, whar's our rifles?"

Every one started from his recumbent position and glanced quickly at the corner wherein the rifles had all been placed, but not seeing them there, they glanced around, supposing some one had moved them. They were not to be seen—they were not to be found—they had disappeared, mysteriously, from the tent!

What did it mean? Who had taken them out? *No one had left the tent since they had entered it!*

To Ben's mind a thought suddenly occurred—a thought that some one of the boys was trying to perpetrate a joke, by concealing the weapons when the tent was filled with smoke and semi-darkness. He was about to give utterance to his thoughts on the subject, but before the words had formed upon his lips, his keen eyes caught the simultaneous flash of several objects near the bottom of the canvas on the opposite side of the tent. His companions did not observe the flashes, each one of which he saw was made by the polished blade of a knife inserted from the outside of the tent! And scarcely were the mysterious blades seen, ere they made a downward pass, and were then withdrawn. The next instant, a dusky face and a pair of burning, glittering eyes glared into the tent through each of the openings thus made!

CHAPTER IV

AN ARGUS EYE OF FIRE.

"GOR A'MIGHTY!" blurted the amazed Bowie-knife Ben; "boys, we're in fur it—the red devils have surrounded us—we're entrapped!"

In an instant every man was upon his feet, surprise and terror written upon his features.

Ben glanced out at the door, and to his horror beheld the now-drift around the tent break up, and a dozen dark objects appear therefrom.

Then all was clear as day to the trapper. While they were away, the Indians, whose number was yet unknown, had come to the tent, and, wrapping their blankets and robes securely around them, had laid down upon the earth with their heads toward the tent, and in fact, almost against it. And there, with all that dogged patience and stoical silence of the American Indian, had they lain and permitted the storm to weave a mantle of snow over them; yet in this they were but showing their characteristic cunning, for all their force was sufficient to have defeated the whites in an open conflict. To surprise and capture a foe is a double victory to an Indian, and upon the present occasion triumph seemed to be a question beyond doubt with the crafty red-man.

The disappearance of the rifles was a mystery to Bowie-knife Ben. How an enemy could abstract the weapons from the lodge without aid from the inside, was a question he could not settle in his mind. But, as sudden as had been his surprise by the savages, so sudden did a faint conviction rush across his mind that there was a traitor in the party!

But, there was no time for an investigation now, for a fierce, savage yell that seemed to issue from a hundred throats, rent the vibrant air, to be succeeded by the crashing of the snow by hurrying feet without.

Knives and pistols leaped from the girdles of the hunters, who nerved themselves for an ordeal that promised but few chances for escape.

The flap door suddenly parted, and the brutal-looking head and face of a half-breed Indian peered into the tent. Then a savage voice demanded:

"S'render, or yer a dead set!"

They were the last words the disguised villain ever uttered. The long arm of Bowie-knife Ben swept through the air at the same instant; a bowie-knife shot from his hand, and its sharp blade went crashing into the skull of the assumed savage as though it had been the soft rind of a melon. With a convulsive gasp the renegade sunk forward, clutching wildly at the quivering haft of the weapon.

This proved a signal for a general attack, and with shrieks and yells "that distanced all the hounds of hell," the savages closed in upon the tent. The frail structure was swept away as if by a hurricane, and then friends and foes grappled with each other and fought hand-to-hand.

Fearful, indeed, were the sounds that startled the midnight, alarming the prowling wolf and the stately buck in their lairs; but the din of the conflict was but a feeble indication of the desperate nature of the conflict itself. It was one of those struggles which have no parallel among brutes—a struggle between human foes, in which all the ferocity of an enraged lion, combined with human instinct, display their deadly animosity in their mad thirst for each other's life-blood. With deliberation, murderous blows were dealt by red-man and white. Pistols, knives and clubs clashed through the air. Hither and thither the foes whirled through the deep drifts, at times almost buried in them, then merging again amid a cloud of snow dashed up by their flying limbs.

For several minutes the conflict thus raged, but the odds were against our friends, three to one, and one by one the hunters were beaten down, overpowered and made prisoners. Bowie-knife Ben alone remained fighting with a circle of bloodthirsty savages around him; but the moment he saw how hopeless his efforts would be, with his companions all prisoners, he uttered one of those fearful war-whoops that was wont to strike terror to savage hearts, bounded through the living circle around him, and, like a deer, shot away into the forest, with half of the disappointed Sioux in swift pursuit.

Two of the red-skins had been slain in the fight and several wounded; and while our friends suffered no loss by death, defeat and captivity, with many severe bruises, were a blow far worse.

The prisoners were securely bound, and then kept standing in the snow for fully an hour, their guards evidently waiting the return of those who had gone in pursuit of Ben.

When, at length, the party did return, a howl of rage and disappointment went up from every savage lip. They had failed to capture the hated enemy, Bowie-knife Ben.

When the confusion subsided, the chief of the band advanced to where the prisoners stood, and having glanced over the faces of all in a speculative manner, finally permitted his gaze to come to a rest upon that of Chris Proctor. Having studied the young man's features for a few moments, he said:

"Let my braves lead that pale-face aside, and prepare the torture for him. His life must pay for that of Black Dog, whom the white Bowie-knife slew."

Young Proctor was led away into the woods, while the other four were conducted out onto the ice in the middle of the bayou, and there placed in a rude tent which the savages had hastily constructed.

The bayou was connected with the Sauk river, and was about four or five rods wide, by twenty in length. It was near its center that the Indians had pitched the tent in which the prisoners were confined, no doubt to await their final doom.

The ice within the tent was clear and smooth as glass, as it was, also, all over the whole surface of the bayou upon which the moonbeams fell in dazzling splendor. What the

object of the Indians was in placing the prisoners there could not be fully understood; but Nathan Reeve supposed it was to have them confined on an open field, where the cunning Bowie-knife could not reach them without being seen, as he would doubtless attempt their release.

There were numerous small holes in the walls of the structure, and through these the captives could look out upon all sides. They saw a dozen savages wrapped in their blankets, and holding their rifles across their laps, seated on each side of the bayou with their faces toward the prison lodge.

"Boys, what do you suppose is to become of us?" Mart Sawyer finally asked.

"God only knows," replied Nathan Reeve. "I presume, however, that our fates will be decided as soon poor Chris Proctor meets his doom."

"Och! Sowl av me body!" wailed Larry O'Ray, "and a sad day it was that mees iver left the sod where shleeps me fathers. And curious enuff it am, too, how our guns disappeared from out our tents before the red divils bounced us."

"Dar am sumthing wrong, gemmen," said Cloudy Tom; "dem dar gunses couldn't walk out ob de tent ob dar own accord, nor nudder could an Inging walk in and take dem out. No, sah; dis chile's 'pinion is dat *somebody* jist done went and hand dem out."

"I have thought as much myself, Tom," replied Nathan; "but of course there is not a shadow of evidence to sustain the probability of such a thing. It is singular, though, that Bowie-knife Ben did not discover the trap before it was sprung. I never knew him to overlook such a danger before. But, of course, the savages were under the light, dry snow piled around the tent, and every trace of their presence securely concealed by the drifting storm. But if Ben has escaped, I daresay he will repay them with some stratagem that they are not dreaming of."

"That may all ba, Natty," replied Larry, "but it'll niver save our loives. "We'll all ba rhoasted afore ta-marry noight by the gory spalpeens. And, och, be me sowl! think av it, me lads: ta-marry noight the Shkating Carnival are to coom off, and jis' think how many poor young colleens will be shedding tears far their lover-b'ys, 'shtead av ghilding over the lake wid them, laughing and chatting—oh, iver so swate and gayly."

A silence followed Larry's remarks, for they sunk deep into every heart. A sigh escaped Nathan Reeve's lips, as he thought of a pair of sweet blue eyes that would watch in vain for his coming to take part in the grand Skating Carnival—a festival to which the young people of Lakeside had long looked forward to in anticipation of a happy and joyous time.

"Well," Nathan finally said, "God's will be done. If we are to die to night, let us meet our fate like men. We might attempt escape were our feet not bound, as well as our hands."

"And ba the Howly Vargin and St. Patrick, too, and mees wouldn't care a darn if I had me feet free and me shkates on, and—"

"A few miles from dis place, why didn't ye say?" interrupted Cloudy Tom, inclined to make the best of their trying situation. Thus the conversation ran on for nearly an hour, and, tired of standing in a stooping position on account of the low tent, the captives finally seated themselves upon the ice, from which the snow had been blown away. They sat facing the center of the tent, and the noise made in thus changing their position led one of the savages to investigate the situation in the tent; but finding all secure, he withdrew to his station on the bank.

Conversation was again resumed by the prisoners, and had continued for some length of time when all suddenly became conscious of a dull, glowing light on the ice near the center of the lodge. It was very faint, and at first appeared like a dull ray of light thrown there by reflection; but as the captives continued to watch it, they saw it was slowly growing brighter and brighter.

"Howly saint, phat is it?" exclaimed Larry O'Ray, in an excited tone.

No one answered him, for no one knew; but Nathan held his hand forward to see if the light was not a reflection. To his surprise, his hand concealed the feeble, glowing spot. It was not a ray of reflected light, neither was it a moon-beam struggling down through the opening in the top of the tent.

What was it?

Nathan Reeve, less superstitious than his companions, leant forward and gazed down at the glowing spot. As he did so, a cry of amazement burst from his lips, and he started up, faintly articulating the word:

"Look!"

His comrades, one by one, leaned forward and gazed down at the mysterious light, each one starting back with wonder and amazement written upon his face. And not without reason, for up from the depths of the bayou—through the clear, transparent ice, they could see a dull, glowing orb of fire slowly rising and gleaming like a sleepless eye of Argus.

Some strange influence sealed the lips of the hunters in speechless silence, as with dilated eyes, they watched the fiery, scintillating orb rise closer and closer—up and up, from the watery depths of the stream, until within a foot of the surface, when its ascent was arrested by the ice. Through the crystal floor of the prison-lodge, a faint, phosphorescent glow from that burning horror shone upon the white, terrified faces of the prisoners.

"In the name of the Howly Vargin, an' isn't Satan hisself coomin' afther his own, me b'ys?" gasped Larry, shrinking back.

"I know not what is," replied Nathan Reeve, not a little puzzled.

"Oh, de bressed Lord!" replied Cloudy Tom, "it am de very ole debbil, boys. Jis' listen! I hear him chawin his way up fru de ice, dis holy minit. Git on your knees, boys, and let's pray to de Lord—"

"Harkee!" commanded Nathan.

They all listened, and true enough they could hear a crackling of the ice beneath their feet—a horrible, grating, craunching sound.

Again they bent their eyes upon that horrible orb of dull flame, and a shudder passed through every frame. Down beneath the blazing light they could see a dark, hairy-looking form, and around it they could see its great limbs moving slowly to and fro in the water, like the arms of some huge sea-monster.

Entranced—spell-bound—the four prisoners stood motionless and speechless, gazing down at the hungry, blazing orb of the mysterious monster, vaguely conscious that it was slowly making its way up from the depths of the bayou, *through the ice into the prison-lodge!*

CHAPTER V.

BOWIE-KNIFE BEN'S STRATAGEM.

LIKE statues carved of stone, and representing the emotions of fear and astonishment, the four captive-hunters stood and gazed upon that strange, burning horror, glaring up at them like the red eye of doom. They could still hear that chawing of the ice, as Cloudy Tom expressed it, and soon a dark circle, two feet in diameter, appeared on the inner side of the ice; and swift as an arrow, a limb of the unknown monster could be seen following around and around the circle, as though it were endeavoring to cut out the block defined by the dark ring, and get up into the tent.

Nathan Reeve debated with himself as to whether he should call his captors, and make known the situation, or wait until he was sure of the real character of the monster whose form they could but imperfectly see. He was surprised that the Indians did not discover the light from the outside; but when he remembered that the bayou was covered with a thin layer of snow, he was fully satisfied that no eyes but their own could see the glaring, flaming orb, the snow having been brushed aside within the tent before the captives were placed therein.

For several minutes the monster continued to lash its limb around and around the circle, which all could now see was being made by a wearing or cutting away of the ice underneath. Now and then they caught the flash of something bright, as the dark arm of the monster swept around the deepening circle, and at length there was heard a slight metallic ring or click, and at the same instant the ice was chipped through *into the tent!*

"Now comes the tug, boys!" whispered Nathan, his breath coming quick and hard.

"Howly Mother, save me blessed sowl!" gasped Larry O'Ray. "Whooch! Saint Path—"

He did not finish the sentence, for at this juncture the circular block of ice was pushed slowly upward into the

tent; but before it was clear of the space from which it had been hewn, it dropped suddenly back and disappeared from view in the depths below—not, however, with a plunge, but a dull thud.

The prisoners started back, expecting to see the monster appear through the opening thus made in the center of their prison-floor. But to their surprise, they beheld a dark, *waterless cavity beneath the thick crust of ice upon which they stood!*

Simultaneous with this discovery, a dull-red torch, held by a small, bony hand, appeared in the opening from below, followed by the bearded, triumphant face and broad, massive shoulders of Bowie-knife Ben, the hunter strategist!

A cry of joy and surprise arose to the lips of the astonished prisoners; but a single look and sign from the scout enjoined the deepest silence upon them.

With his body but half above the ice, the dwarf reached forward with his right hand, in which he held a knife, and cut the bonds of his friends, at the same time saying, in a whisper:

"Hop down under the ice and crawfish arter me. The torch'll tell ye whar to go—scat!"

Down went the scout beneath the ice, and in less than ten seconds his four friends were at his side. The whole time required in effecting the release and escape of the prisoners, from the moment Ben made his appearance through the ice, occupied scarcely thirty seconds, and so silently had it been accomplished that they might have been a long way from there ere the discovery of their escape was made, had it not been for Bowie-knife Ben. Eager that the foe, whose cunning had got them into trouble, might know that he had outwitted them—beaten them at their own game—the trapper protruded his head into the tent again, and gave utterance to one of his well-known war-whoops. This brought a score of warriors to the prison-lodge, and wild and terrible were their yells and cries of baffled triumph when they discovered that their prisoners were gone, and the manner in which they had effected their escape. The lodge was torn away, and as the clear moonlight revealed the opening in the ice, the savages' first impression was that the prisoners had sought self-destruction by drowning; but when they discovered that there was no water beneath the ice—that the bayou was dry, their rage and fury knew no bounds.

Although this freak of the bayou is frequently met with in the higher latitudes of the north temperate zone, it was evident that this party of savages had never seen the like before; and at first they were inclined to look upon the matter as an intervention of the Great Spirit to save the pale-faces, by drawing away the water from beneath the ice.

The matter, however, is easily accounted for. A few weeks previous, the weather had "loosened up," which resulted in a winter thaw, and the snow and ice melting, swelled the rivers and streams to overflowing. The bottom of the bayou in question, being below low-water mark, of course was usually dry, but upon the occasion of the last flood, it had become filled with back-water from the river; and while it was thus at its highest, the wind shifted to the north, the mercury fell to forty degrees below zero, and the bayou was frozen over fully a foot deep. The swift action of the river's current, however, prevented it from freezing over at the same time; and the supply from the small streams being suddenly stopped, the river began to fall, and as it sunk lower and lower, the bayou was gradually drained; and by the time the river had attained its average depth, not a drop of water remained in the bayou. The ice, however, remained over the latter, just as it had formed, being of sufficient thickness and strength to bear not only its own weight, but that of a score and a half of men.

Bowie-knife Ben, fully acquainted with all the phenomena peculiar to a northern winter, was not slow in discovering the condition of the bayou. He had, in scouting around the place, seen his four friends placed on the ice in the Indian *wickeup*, and at once resolved to attempt their rescue; how he succeeded, we have seen.

A strange, mysterious feeling of awe came over the hunters the moment they were under the ice; for a weird-like darkness seemed to surround them, and hollow, ghostly voices to echo and rumble through the dismal, wintry cavern.

"Now come, boys," said Ben, as soon as he had uttered his shout of triumph, "foller me, fur it might be a leetle sickly 'round here."

Half crouching, for the space was not over three feet deep, the four hunters followed Ben in a course that took them

toward the river. They had gone about three rods when Ben came to a halt, and said:

"There, boys, are your rifles and your skates that I managed to save as well as yerselves. The varlets had piled our traps and things up together and left only one blood-sucker to guard 'em. That war a nice thing, so I obliterated the skunk and secured the rifles and skates as I thought they'd be the mos' needed. But, lads, weren't it a splendoriferous tune I played the bloody goblins? *Hoh ho! ho!*" and his triumphant laugh echoed and re-echoed in wild accents through the ice-covered cavern.

"It was a fortunate 'tune' for us, Ben," said Reeve, "but I tell you it came within an ace of being a failure."

"How so, lad?"

"We supposed there was nothing less than ten feet of water beneath us, and when we saw your light, we were so surprised that we came nigh giving the alarm."

"Humph!" ejaculated the hunter, in apparent surprise, "I took the light on purpose so's you could see what it war and then keep mum, fur I know'd if you'd hear me cuttin' up into the tent, you'd squirm a good 'eal if you didn't know what war comin'."

"We could not see you plain enough to distinguish your form and face, for all appeared dark beneath you. We could see the light and a dark something moving around it, and that was all. But how did you know where our tent was?"

"Oh, bless you, jist squint up'ards. You can see the stars and moon through the ice plain as you want to, so you see it war no trouble to tell when I war under yer tent. I took my bearin's afore I started under yer, and—heavens! how the red imps rant and howl! Boys, get your rifles in trim for speakin' out. The brutes may get under here arter awhile, and if they do, we'll scorch a few of 'em. See also that yer skates are ready for adjustment, fur you may have need of them afore we git clear of these diggin's. Guess now, I'll put this light out."

So saying, he extinguished his torch, and then our friends found themselves in a darkness dimly pervaded by the moonlight shining through the ice overhead. Beneath them, the black, alluvial deposits of ages rendered all in gloom, while above them they could see the tops of the forest trees on either shore, and now and then could see a savage form sweeping over the ice, appearing like a huge cloud in human shape, drifting across the face of the heavens.

The voice of the outwitted red-skins could be heard in wild and stormy conversation around the hole where the captives had escaped. They appeared to be in some doubt whether to follow the fugitives or not, as the condition of the bayou under the ice was not fully known to them.

Ben and his companions remained perfectly quiet, waiting for any demonstration the foe might attempt; nor had they long to wait. A torch was dropped down into the cavern, if it may be so termed, and its light appeared to give the red-skins additional information regarding the true state of the situation, for immediately afterward a savage with a flaming torch descended into the great ice bound vault. He was at once followed by another, and still another companion, until at least a dozen had descended. Each one carried a torch in one hand and a tomahawk in the other, and as he held the former above his head and glared around him, his demoniac features were plainly revealed to the hunters, in the sickly, ghostly glare of the light.

At length the torches were lowered, and the savages set out to explore the cavern.

"Now, my boys," whispered Bowie-knife, "make ready and pluck yer posy. Their lights 'll tell ye whar to pull."

The suppressed breathing of the hunters was at once followed by the click of gunlocks and the pent-up roar of five rifles, following each other in almost continuous succession. The next instant all the wild and terrible intonations of Pandemonium jarred through the cavern. The clash of the rifles, groans of agony, shouts of triumph, and yells of vengeance—all mingled together and echoed from side to side, and end to end, as if unable to find an outlet from the dismal cavern.

A few minutes later the rush of many feet were heard overhead, beneath the tread of which the ice creaked and strained in a manner that threatened the safety of those beneath. But the danger soon passed, and then Ben said:

"Now, lads, let's shift our posish, and if 'em red purps don't see fit to leave these diggin's, we'll yoop them up another broadside."

The party at once changed its position further on toward the river. By this time torches were flashing forth their

sickly, ghostly light all over the cavern, and back of each could be seen the grim, dusky outlines of a savage; while on the field above the sound of blows could be heard falling thick and fast. This told that the savages were cutting holes in the ice at various points around the fugitives.

"Ho! ho! ho!" laughed Ben, in a low, silent tone; "the varlets might as well try to git into heaven for victims as in here arter us. But them critters off hereaways, boys, are clus enuff for a dip, so pick yer bud and nip it."

Again the rifles of the rangers went to their shoulders, and drawing against the torches, vomited forth their deadly missiles.

Again confusion and dismay filled the cavern with reverberated sounds, and torches flickered and flashed hither and thither in wild haste.

"Lor' Almighty, but dis am fun aftah all," said Cloudy Tom, as he proceeded to reload his rifle.

"Hooh! Och, now, and isn't this much sw'ater than bain' chawed by a monsther, though?" replied Larry O'Ray.

"Boys, look up overhead." It was Ben who spoke.

All raised their eyes, and directly overhead on the ice, they saw two persons standing. One was a white man and the other an Indian—this was easy to determine. They appeared to be engaged in an excited conversation, for now and then the white man would make a violent gesture—pointing hither and thither over the bayou in an uneasy and impatient manner.

"Boys, do you recognize that white man?" asked Bowie-knife Ben.

They all scanned the figure closely as possible for several moments.

"By heavens!" suddenly burst from Nathan Reeve's lips; "It is our friend, Chris Proctor!"

"Yes, our friend, Chris Proctor," repeated Ben, in a tone that possessed a world of meaning.

CHAPTER VI.

OUT OF THE CAVERNS.

THE discovery of Chris Proctor being free and in conversation with one of the savages was, alone, sufficient to arouse grave suspicions in the minds of the hunters; but before they had assumed a tangible conclusion, Bowie-knife Ben said:

"Now, boys, is our time to skin outen this cavern. By keepin' on in the way my nose p'ints, we'll come out right onto the river, and then if we all have our skates on we can rush away from the lopin' owl-eaters like a greased bird sailin' through the air."

"But the entrance may be guarded."

"If so, we can soon clear the way, lads, so jist h'ist on yer skates and let's be dodgin' out."

It required but a few minutes to fasten on their skates and prepare for departure. When all was ready, Ben led the way toward the entrance, and when within a rod of the open air he halted, and bidding his companions remain quiet while he reconnoitered the vicinity, he crept away. He was gone but a few minutes when he returned and reported:

"I can see no reds about, but thar may be some hid around, and a single shot might play the ole boy with the whole kit o' us. But stiffen yer siners and git ready to rush out like greased thunder."

"We're all ready," replied Nathan Reeve.

"Then—scat!"

There was a swift, fluttering rush of feet, and together the hunters glided out of the cavern, leaped down onto the river ice, and shot away down the Sauk, the sharp ring of their skates upon the smooth ice breaking forth upon the clear, frosty air with startling distinctness. The sound told the savage foe that their game had escaped, after all their subtle cunning, and with fierce, vengeful yells they started down the river in swift pursuit. But, as well might they pursue so many deer. Success in capturing them would have been as certain, for at every rod the hunters more than doubled upon them.

Our friends were all experienced in the use of skates, for it forms one of the chief winter amusements of the young people of the border. With shouts of defiance they sped on over the glassy bosom of the river, feeling no fear of the foe whose yells were momentarily fading far behind. They were now about twenty miles from home, and the hour was

not far from midnight; and as they could make the whole distance to Lakeside—their home—on skates, they felt no fears of being overtaken by the savage pursuers.

"Well, boys," said Ben, when they had journeyed about five miles, "we might go a leetle slower now and take wind for another heat."

The party slacked its speed to a more moderate pace, when conversation was at once opened in a lively spirit.

"I must say," remarked Nathan Reeve, "that this night has been one through which I would not like to pass again."

"Ay, now, me lad, and it's jist fun fur the loikes of Larry O'Ray," said the now happy Hibernian, "but I rather be at Lakeside than—"

"Whar dar am danger," interrupted Cloudy Tom, with a laugh at his own conceit.

"Blarst yeer black skin av yees, nigger, and it is yees that turned white as a ghost when yees heard the monsther a-chawin' and a-chawin' up through the oice; so it war, bedad."

An outburst of laughter followed the Irishman's retort.

"Ben," said Nathan Reeve, finally, "what do you understand by Chris Proctor being at liberty, and in conversation with that savage on the bayou?"

"Somethin' wrong with that boy," replied Ben. "I'm inclined to suspect him of treachery, lads. I believe it war him that handed our rifles outen our tent, and if so, he knewed 'em reds war about. But what he can mean by turnin' traitor to us, bu'sts my noggin to imagine. I alers thought, though, that that boy had a ten-year-older head on him than mos' folks thought for. Howsumever, we might been mistaken in that bein' Chris with the Injin on the ice; you know we're all liable to mistakes. If Chris gets back to Lakeside we can keep an eye onto him, and say nothin' 'bout what we suspected or see'd on the ice; and if he is tryin' to git us into trouble, we'll warm the wax in his years in slap-up style."

"A hint from Father St. Ule's bright-eyed gal, whom rumor says he's goin' to marry, might bring him to terms," said Martin Sawyer.

"Ther Lord save purty Sybil St. Ule from the love of a villain," exclaimed Bowie-knife Ben. "No purer heart than hern ever beat; and if Chris Proctor ever weds her, he must exonerate hisself from what we see'd to-night. I have promised the old missionary, as some call him, that I'd watch over his cabin until the Injin Bible that he's writin' is finished, even if it took twenty years. If our Bible translated into Injin blatherskite jargon 'll do any good with the red hashints, I'm willin' to help the cause along; tho' I'd heap ruther argify with them in lead and powder, fur whenever ye make that argiment felt in an Injin's heart, it's sure to convert him, and— Harkee! harkee!"

Above the slow, measured ringing of their skates, the scout's keen ears caught a sound resembling the bark of a wolf.

The party at once came to a halt and listened. The ring of steel upon the ice could be faintly heard. The sound came from down the river, but a sharp bend a short distance before them cut off all view over a hundred yards away. But before the party had time for much speculation over the matter, a dark body swept suddenly into view from around the point. It was moving with great rapidity, and from its midst arose that clinking of steel upon the ice. As the moving mass drew nearer it began to assume a more distinct and tangible form; and when within a few paces of our friends, Bowie-knife Ben suddenly cried out:

"By Judas, it's a dog sledge!"

Scarcely were the words uttered when a dozen fierce-looking dogs, with snarling teeth and blazing eyes, swept past our astonished friends, harnessed to a light sledge similar to those used by the Esquimaux of the North. Upon the sledge sat the figure of a young girl, nestled cosily in among a heap of robes and furs; and but for the pretty white face and dark eyes peeping from between the borders of a beaver hood, no one would have known that the form was that of a woman. The moon was shining full upon the river, and as she swept by like the north wind, she started so suddenly at sight of them that she was nearly thrown from the sledge; and Ben was sure he heard a suppressed cry escape her lips. In a few moments, however, she had vanished from sight, and the astonished hunters stood gazing, one at the other, with a puzzled, interrogative expression upon each face.

"Blue blazes and rampin' tigers! what does that mean?" asked Bowie-knife Ben.

"You tell!" replied Nathan Reeve.

"Arrah, now, and who see'd anything at all?" asked O'Ray, in doubt as to the evidence of his own eyes, so swiftly had the sleigh passed in and out of sight.

"Was it a delusion?" asked Ben, as if he, too, was in doubt; "or did I act'ly see a dog-sleigh shoot past me with a woman—a purty, white faced angel upon it?"

"I saw the same, Ben," replied Nathan. "It was no delusion, but actual fact. I saw the girl's face, or a portion of it, and I am—"

"Am what?" interrupted Ben, excitedly.

"I am sure the girl's face was that of the missionary's daughter, Sybil St. Ule."

"Dancin' David!" exclaimed the hunter, "that's jist what I thought! But it couldn't have been Sybil, and so who was it? What's it mean? You know Sybil's father will not let her leave the cabin after night, say nothing of sleighing away up here alone 'mong Injins, wolves and cattamounts. No, by hokey, it war *not* Sybil, but it war her ghost, or her counterpart. Sybil is naterally a leetle coward, too, arter nightfall, and won't go out alone 'less some one's along to protect her, and this critter that jist went by war all alone exceptin' her dogs, an', Je-whiz! what horrible-lookin' critters they were!"

"If it were not Sybil St. Ule, who was it? and what on earth can any woman be doing abroad on such a night as this?"

"There, there, you've cornered me, Natty. It's singular, very singular, boy. Thar's sumthin' not right in Minnysota, else these parts are haunted—act'ly haunted with male giants and female nymphs. I'll go to St. Ule's to-night yit. I must know that that little angel Sybbie is safely snugged away in her bed, asleep, afore I can draw a clear breath. I've promised the old Bible-maker that I'd keep ward and watch over his shanty, and I'll do it or bu'st. Humph! in course that warn't Sybil; jist think if it were, she'd run slap-dab into the hands of 'em essences of concentrated cussedness comin' down the river arter us. But it wer'n't her—sich a thing's onpossible—and even if it war her, what if thunder and hurrycane could she be doin' away up here in thi screech-owl corner, this time of night?"

"Ah, yes; that's the question, my dear friend," replied Nathan, with a dubious shake of the head. "Dangers and mysteries go hand in hand to-night. As well may we inquire, what was Chris Proctor doing with—"

Here silence was enjoined upon the speaker by a light tip, tip, like that of feet walking briskly upon the ice. Whatever it was that made the noise was coming down the river, and keeping itself concealed within the shadows of the left shore. Satisfied, however, that it was the approaching footsteps of enemies, our friends resumed their journey. For some length of time they continued on without interruption; but at length their attention was suddenly arrested by the star-like twinkling of a light on the right shore. Slacking their speed, Ben exclaimed:

"Ah! that light is in Father St. Ule's cabin. Hold up here, boys, while I go over and inquire 'bout Sybil, for I can't think the gal that spun apast us on the sleigh war her."

The party came to a halt while Ben climbed the bank, and without removing his skates, approached the cabin door, upon which he gave a vigorous rap.

A voice bade him come in.

He opened the door and crossed the threshold.

A pleasant and joyous sight met his gaze.

A warm, cheery fire burned in the great wide fireplace in one end of the cabin, and within its cheerful glow, and before a rude table covered with a heap of manuscripts, sat Father St. Ule; and by his side, acting as his amanuensis, sat his lovely, bright-eyed, rosy-cheeked daughter, Sybil St. Ule.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MASKED CARNIVAL

THE little village of Lakeside and the home and headquarters of the five hunters of whom we have been writing, was a settlement composed of about twenty cabins, and was located upon the eastern side of a small body of water known as Fall Lake. At the time of which we write, it was one of the advance posts of civilization in Minnesota. There was, however, a smaller settlement south of the lake known as Budd's Station, but with this we have nothing particular to do at present.

The Indians, since the founding of Lakeside, had been all along in a hostile attitude toward the whites; but notwithstanding this fact, they had never ventured an attack upon the little settlement. Fully acquainted with the nature of the foe with which they would have to contend, they kept their distance. The settlement, however, suffered some loss, both in prosperity and life. Horses and cattle had been stolen, or shot in the herd; while small hunting parties had been captured and slain, as was attempted with the party of Bowie knife Ben.

Shortly after nightfall on the evening following the night of events narrated in the preceding chapters, two persons, arm in arm, issued from the village of Lakeside and moved slowly down toward the lake, conversing in low tones as they went. One of these persons was a man, the other a woman: the former Nathan Reeve, the latter his betrothed, Wilma Meredith.

With Nathan the reader is already acquainted. His handsome, manly face, however, wore a more natural and joyous expression than on the night previous, for the voice of love now whispered in sweet, musical tones in his ears.

Wilma Meredith was a maid of about eighteen years, with a petite figure beautifully developed in all the attributes of perfect womanhood; dark-blue eyes, golden hair, a pretty, round face with dimpled chin, ripe, red lips, and rosy cheeks to which the crispy air of the wintry evening gave an additional glow of health and brightness.

Both were warmly clad. Wilma wore a dress of dark worsted, a cape of sable colored furs, a beaver hood and mink-skin mittens.

Nathan carried two pairs of skates and two unlit torches of resinous pine, and when they reached the lake, they paused upon the bank and gazed out over the broad, glassy sheet of ice where a glorious spectacle met their view.

This was the night of the masked skating carnival at Fall Lake, an entertainment to which the settlers, both young and old, of Lakeside, Budd's Station and other places had long looked forward to with joyous anticipations. By sunset the skaters had begun to come in, and by the time Nathan and Wilma had reached the lake, two score of red, flaming torches were moving over its icy bosom with the swiftness of meteors, borne in the hands of men and women who were masked and disguised in a dozen different costumes that lent a variegated hue to the scene. Hither and thither, across each other's path—around and around glided the flaming, wavering torches, the shadows of the moving figures and the flashing of the rays of light, constantly changing and checkering the crystal bosom of the lake with bars of light and shadow. And added to this dazzling, grotesque scene was the metallic ring of the skates upon the ice, deepening almost into a roar, and mingled with the merry peals of laughter from the lips of some light-hearted girl as she sped by some friend whom she recognized beneath his or her disguise, or the hoarser notes of some male masquerader as he trilled forth the words of some wild border song.

"Oh, Nathan! isn't it delightful?" exclaimed the bright-eyed Wilma, in a sweet, musical voice full of girlish enthusiasm.

"It is, indeed, my dear girl," replied Nathan; "and I hope you will enjoy the evening's festivity."

"Thank you, Nathan; and I pray the pleasures of to-night will be as pleasant to you as the dangers of last night were perilous—but, Nathan, what disguise are you going to wear?"

"Why, my love, are we not to keep our identity a secret from one another?" asked Nathan.

"Yes," replied Wilma, shyly lifting her witching eyes to those of her lover; "but then you can just tell me, Nathan, so I will know when you are near me."

"Well, I will wear this," said Nathan, removing his cap and dropping a leather mask attached to the lining of his coon-skin.

"I will wear nothing but a brown vail," replied Wilma.

"For fear there may be others there in similar disguise, I will attach this to your cape so that I may know *you*," and he fastened a sprig of wild holly to a button on her cape.

This done, he buckled Wilma's skates on her feet, and then lit one of the torches and gave it to her. The maiden drew her vail from under the borders of her hood, and dropping it over her face, announced her readiness for departure to join in the mazes of the moving throng upon the ice.

Nathan led her down to the edge of the ice, and lifting the veil, imprinted a kiss upon her brow; then she shot away over the ice with the ease and grace of a fawn, and soon was in the midst of the joyous crowd.

The young borderman watched her until her form had become lost in the moving, changing throng of men and women; then he donned his own disguise, put on his skates, and lighting his torch, sped away after his sweetheart.

He had scarcely reached the crowd before a figure crept out from a clump of bushes near where the lovers had stood, descended the bank, and putting on a pair of skates, glided away upon the trail of young Reeve. This person carried no torch, yet it could be readily seen that he wore the disguise of an American Indian. His face was not masked otherwise than with pigments of piebald colors. A single feather adorned his scalp-lock, and a necklace of bear-claws was around his neck. His feet and legs were incased in moccasins of dirty buck-skin; while a green blanket, with many devices wrought in colors upon it, flapped and flaunted about his shoulders as he swept across the lake.

One by one the skaters swarmed out from the shadows of the shores and swelled the throng until fully three score were moving hither and thither, a living wave of happy joyous beings—all *en mask*—laughing, singing and talking in disguised, unnatural tones.

Costumes alone, or the remnants of costumes, represented a dozen different nationalities; for Lakeside and Budd's Station, like all other frontier settlements, were made up of men from all quarters of the globe. And nearly all retained some article, or idea, at least, of their native costume, which was brought to light on the present festive occasion. The border hunter and settler, in their rude habiliments of buck-skin and linsey-woolsey, comprised the majority of the masqueraders. But, from amid the circling crowd, a close observer could select figures clothed in costumes peculiar to various nations and classes of people. There was the American Indian, trigged out in paint and feathers; here the "down-Easter," in his proverbial bell-crown hat and swallow-tail coat. Yonder glided a tall, rough, booted Texan, with the characteristic swagger, and here a figure—the most conspicuous of all the men—a Mexican *ranchero* with spencer jacket of velveteen, *calzoneros*, laced along the seams, boots with heavy, tinkling spurs at the heels, and *sombrero* banded with silver. There was another figure, in the costume of an Italian bandit, and there another, in a different garb; and so on, until the eye grows weary of looking them out, and the mind confused in placing them in the order of their nationality.

With the females, there was less variety in dress. Most all the girls were the daughters of the settlers, whose usually limited circumstances admitted of little variety in the matter of a wardrobe. There was one female in the party, however, that claimed especial notice, by reason of her dress, and the wonderful ease, grace and swiftness of her movements.

She was dressed from her knees to her throat in a frock of snow-white furs. A white hood was upon her head, a veil covered her face, and white fur mittens incased her hands; and the torch that she bore gave an additional sheen of whiteness to this typical robe of innocence and purity.

Wherever the Woman in White, as she was termed, floated, as it were, masked faces turned and followed her, apparently with great curiosity to know who it was.

Few of the masqueraders recognized each other, but some of those that did, finally dropped into pairs, and talked and questioned each other in low tones on the various figures moving around them. But of all, the Woman in White, the Mexican *ranchero*, and the Indian with the bear-claw necklace, whom we have seen follow Nathan Reeve unto the lake, appeared to attract the most attention; for no one there appeared to know them.

There was a large group of spectators strung along the shore, wrapped in their furs and blankets, watching the circling, gliding throng of happy revelers. It was principally composed of men and women whose age or inexperience in the use of skates would not admit of their taking part in the festivities of the occasion. There were, however, a few exceptions, one of which was Bowie-knife Ben, the hunter. He had no equal in the use of skates, yet took no part in the carnival. He stood alone, at one side, leaning upon his rifle, his constant companion, regarding the grand and dazzling spectacle before him with a mingled expression of delight and anxiety. It was evident to many, however, that he was not easy—that some vague consciousness of danger weighed constantly upon his mind. This might have been attributed

to his inborn hatred of the Indians, and the presence of those of the skaters in savage disguise harrowing up his feelings; for, whenever one of the Indian masqueraders passed near him, he would start with a nervous jerk, and his brow would contract with an angry scowl. He had stood fully an hour with his eyes fixed upon the skaters, as if endeavoring to penetrate every disguise, when a hand was laid upon his shoulder and a voice asked:

"How do you like the carnival, signior?"

The speaker was an elderly man, claiming to be an Italian, but spoke English fluently.

"Why, Mr. de Vasco," replied Ben, turning and facing his interlocutor, "I jist think it's spankin'—*dem foine*, as French Jules says."

"It is grand, magnificent, senor," replied de Vasco. "It reminds me of a night in Venice upon some festive occasion, when the streets, or canals, I should have said, are swarming with lighted gondolas, and are rife with the songs of the youth and beauty of the Queen of the Adriatic. But that woman dressed in white—yonder, signior—do you know who she is?"

"Think I do," was the laconic reply.

"And do you know who that Indian with the bear-claw necklace, and that fellow in the garb of a Mexican ranchero, are?" questioned the Italian.

"No, I don't. Nor I don't like the movements of that ole B'ar-Claw. Durn the Injin part of it. I hate the red varlets so that it makes me bile over to see even a white man in the disguise. Besides, thar's half a dozen Injin rigs on the lake now; and all new-comers are Injins, and who knows but most of 'em are ginewine."

"I have noticed that the Woman in White, and the Indian of the bear-claws, as well as the Mexican, appear to attract considerable attention and curiosity. And I notice, also, that the woman and Indian manage to pass and repas, each other quite frequently."

"Indeedy!" exclaimed the scout; "I have noticed it, too. Guess they know each other."

"Very likely, signior; but can you tell me who that lady is that just passed us, with a sprig of holly on her breast?"

"Think it's Miss Wilma Meredith. Lordy, but she's a sweet little creature, boss; and, aside from ole St. Ule's gal, Sybil, thar's not a bein' in Minnysoty that can beat her fur downright booty and konsentrated sweetness. See how graceful she floats along! Tor-ment it, no wonder Natty Reeve loves the gal."

"The Bear-Claw must be that lover, for I notice the Indian manages to keep near her, as you can see. But, after all, what a wonderful theme for speculation and conjectures just such a carnival furnishes for both spectators and participants. And, I dare say, this night will never be forgotten by those present; but see here, friend, you have not told me who that Lady in White is."

"Wal, I think it's Miss—"

"Signior! signior! for God's sake, behold!" suddenly interrupted the Italian, grasping the hunter excitedly by the arm, and pointing away toward the southern side of the lakelet.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE KING OF WINTER.

BOWIE-KNIFE BEN bent his gaze in the direction indicated by the hand of the excited de Vasco, and from out the distance he beheld a tall, shadowy figure approaching, the sight of which was sufficient to fill a less brave heart with terror. At the same instant that he caught sight of it, a murmur of excitement passed through the crowd assembled along the shore, and a wavering of the line of excited spectators threatened a momentary panic. And yet the cause of all this unnecessary commotion was but the figure of a man; but in the uncertain glimmering of the torch-lights he seemed a being of unearthly proportions. Besides, his general aspect was absolutely frightful and calculated to bear heavily upon the minds of the superstitious.

To each shoulder the giant had a flaming torch attached, which resembled wings of lurid fire, and the light of these lent an additional look of terror to the figure of the man. His hair hung in long, scraggy locks down his back and his ponderous beard, which literally covered his face, was filled with long, glittering icicles that rattled and clanked with

each movement of the head. His leggings and coat were made of undressed bear-skin, the hair of which was filled with snowflakes that glittered like diamonds. His head was bare. At his back he carried a huge quiver filled with feather-tipped arrows, while in his hand he carried a long bow, tightly strung.

Those on the bank saw the approach of the giant before the skaters did, but when his presence was discovered by the latter, a general murmur of excitement thrilled through the crowd, and many paused in their sport to watch the intruder.

With lightning velocity the unnatural giant, with icy, clanking beard, swept over the lake, his skates fairly roaring upon the smooth ice, powdered jets of which dashed up in front of his feet like puffs of steam; for under the ponderous weight of the man, the steel soles of his skates cut deep into the ice—marking plainly his path over the surface of the lake.

The excitement so suddenly created by this giant's appearance soon subsided, and the sport of the skaters was resumed, the unknown giant participating with an energy that seemed superhuman. And despite the resolutions of the skaters, every one mechanically shrank from the unknown, whenever he came near.

The Woman in White suddenly swept alongside of our young friend, Nathan Reeve, and leaning slightly to one side, said:

"That character heads the list of masqueraders in point of originality—some cunning big fellow come in the guise of the King of Winter."

The remark was heard by other ears than Nathan's; and soon it passed from lip to lip that the strange monster in human form was a stranger come in the *role* of the King of Winter. And so the carnival went on, yet none could overcome the involuntary inclination to evade the King of Winter.

"What in Heaven's name does it mean, signior?" asked de Vasco.

"Tor-ment it, de Vasco," replied Ben, endeavoring to conceal the perturbation of mind that his voice betrayed; "you've got me now. I've had a glimpse of that 'tarnal critter afore; he's Titan, the Terror of the North, though it's a God's blessin' no one but you and me know it, tor-ment it, if it arn't!"

"Why, signior, he's only mortal, is he not?"

"They say he is not."

"Tut, tut! It's all a hoax. That fellow is only a man of an extraordinary size and bight—possibly all of seven, or seven and a half feet. He even appears taller than that among the rest of the masqueraders. I dare say he's some one known to you."

"It may be, de Vasco; but look at the tormented big slummix! he's follerin' that Gal in White as tho' he wanted to make love to her. Torment it, wouldn't it be orful if he'd grab her up and shell out with her? For fear sich a thing'll happen, I'll jist keep my Mary Ann ready to drap him," and the scout swung his rifle in the hollow of his left arm, while his thumb rested upon the hammer and his finger upon the guard in front of the trigger.

"Well, well; I am anxious to know something further of that giant. I knew a negro in Tennessee once, fully as large as that giant; but he disappeared all at once, as did his master, also; and now a large reward—Ahem! did you see that, signior? The King of Winter put out his hand and actually raised the vail of the Woman in White. That was rude—decidedly impudent—but behold, signior! he's now following the Indian with the bear-claw necklace; and see! he draws an arrow from his quiver—he fixes it to his bowstring. Holy saints! does he mean to do violence? Ah! by heavens! he draws the arrow to its head—look! he is going to shoot the Indian, signior—there, my God!—murder!"

The last word was uttered in a loud, excited tone, and was immediately followed by a cry of agony from the lips of the Indian masquerader, who, grasping at the open air, staggered forward and fell dead, his body pierced through by a barbed arrow shot from the great bow of the mysterious Titan, who, never slackening his speed, shot away across the lake and soon disappeared from sight behind a point of land thrust out into the lake.

Cries of horror arose upon the air that but a few minutes before was rife with song and merriment. A portion of the masqueraders deserted the lake, while others, attracted by that horrible fascination in the presence of death, gathered around the slain man.

Bowie-knife Ben and de Vasco were the first to reach the body, in which no spark of life lingered. They found the arrow had pierced the heart, causing instant death.

On examination it was found that the dead man was a white stranger. No one could identify him, and so his body was searched for some clue to his name. A bit of folded paper was found in an inner pocket. De Vasco opened it, and in the glare of a torch, read aloud:

"Luke Foss, don't fail to be at the Skating Carnival to morrow night. You will stand a good chance to abduct Wilma Meredith, if you work things right. We will be there. We will know you by your bear-claw necklace."

"SYL GARNETT."

A cry of surprise burst from the crowd. Masks and disguises were thrown aside, and expressions of indignation passed from lip to lip. Wilma Meredith was overwhelmed with congratulations on her miraculous escape from the power of the notorious outlaw, Syl Garnett.

A search was made among the crowd for suspicious characters; but no one was found who was not known. Syl Garnett and his men had disappeared; and, of course, no one knew when or where they had gone.

Thus the carnival was brought to an abrupt termination, and all sought their homes but Bowie-knife Ben, de Vasco, and Larry O'Ray. They remained behind to take charge of the outlaw's body.

Thus the lake, which had been so lively with festive joy and gayety, was deserted; and a deep, dismal, chaotic silence pervaded the surrounding. The pale moon looked to earth and added its ghastly beams to the somber aspect of the wintry night.

"Well, well," muttered de Vasco, when he found himself deserted by all but Ben and Larry, "this is a tragical ending of the carnival."

"It is, tor-ment the burnin' luck," replied Bowie-knife Ben. "But it's no more'n I expected when I see'd that all-fired big sky-scraper, Titan, put in his appearance."

"But after all he saved Miss Meredith from being abducted, as those villains had plotted," replied de Vasco.

"That's all true, de Vasco; but who the tor-ments is the critter?"

"Ben," and de Vasco's voice fell almost to a whisper, "I've been at Lakeside, off and on, a dozen times, and you all know me as de Vasco; and the Lord only knows the stigma that has been attached to my name because none of you know what I am here for. I am a detective, to speak plain, and am in search of one Garloff Meur; also one Tiberius Rado. The latter is a negro of wonderful size—in fact, was the largest man in America. He used to be a slave in Tennessee, but all at once his master disappeared, and it was suspected that Tiberius murdered him. Before he could be arrested, however, away he went, and for years men have been searching for him all over the world. A reward of—well, no difference about the reward—but I'm inclined to think that *your* Titan, the Terror of the North, is *my* man, Tiberius Rado."

"Tarnal tor-ments! you don't say so?" exclaimed Bowie-knife Ben. "Wal, s'pose it's so, who's goin' to try to kaptur that critter? Why, holy saints of Jerusa-leml you might as well try to bag a whirlwind."

"He's mortal, he's mortal, Ben; and I think you can manage some way to circumvent and entrap him; and now—"

Here silence was imposed upon the speaker by the tip, tip of footsteps approaching within the shadows of the east shore, near which they stood, and a quick glance in the direction in which the sound emanated, revealed several skulking forms creeping along in the shadows.

"Let us leave the body and hump ourselves ashore," said Ben. "We may find out sumthin' more, fur I know 'em skulkin' brutes are friends of this dead varmint—now, scat!"

The trio turned and hastened ashore, and scarcely were they under cover of the woods ere the skulkers crept out from the shadows of the shore and approached the body of the dead man.

Our friends scanned the party closely. There were five Indians and one white man. The latter Bowie-knife Ben recognized as one of the late masqueraders—the one dressed in the garb of the Mexican *rinchero*.

"Och, now, and who can that blloody rhascal ba?" questioned Larry O'Ray.

Before either the hunter or de Vasco could answer, the man placed his fingers to his lips and gave utterance to a low, warbling whistle.

Then from out the gloomy shadows of the northern shore of the lake, came the ring of steel upon the ice, and the next minute a pack of dogs appeared in sight. They were all attached to two sledges, one of which was fastened behind the other. Upon the forward one was seated the driver, robed in white.

"By Judas!" exclaimed de Vasco, "isn't it the Woman in White that was among the skaters awhile ago?"

"Lordy, man, it can't be her—by the 'tarnal torments it can't be! But we'll soon see, fur she's comin' right to'ards them six bloody boogers."

In a few moments more the sledges drew up alongside the Mexican and Indians. The latter lifted the body of the dead man from the ice and placed it on the hind sledge. Then, at a wave of the hand and a word from the driver, the dogs turned on a short circle toward the north and sped away, the Mexican and Indians following on behind.

"By the heavens above us, boys!" exclaimed Bowie-knife Ben, his face assuming an expression of profound amazement and wonder, "the driver of them dog-sledges is that Woman in White!"

CHAPTER IX.

NATHAN REEVE'S TROUBLE.

NATHAN REEVE accompanied Wilma Meredith home from the lake after the tragical termination of the carnival. The note found on the dead man's person formed the general topic of conversation. Both were seriously impressed over the hairbreadth escape of Wilma from abduction, and yet they rejoiced, in the fullness of their young hearts, that the vile plot of Syl Garnett had been defeated.

The matter, however, seemed to affect Nathan more deeply than it did Wilma; but from his conversation the maiden deduced an inference that there was something still back of the villainy of Garnett that weighed heaviest upon his mind.

"My dear girl," he said, when they found themselves alone on their way home, "let me caution you about venturing alone or unprotected beyond the confines of the village. That vile renegade, Syl Garnett, has his plans laid for your capture, and he has the whole Indian nation to assist him in carrying them out."

"For your sake, Nathan, I will observe your wishes and use every precaution," replied Wilma, "though it is probable that the renegade will not trouble us again."

"No telling, dear Wilma; those villains are not easily defeated, and the death of their friend Foss may spur up their resolution and put new energy into their wicked designs."

"But that awful giant that came and slew Foss may be keeping watch and ward over Lakeside and its people?" persisted Wilma, loth to believe that danger threatened them.

"I would as soon trust Bowie-knife Ben as that unknown giant, Wilma, for the latter is no more than a mortal being of large proportions and an air of mystery about him; while Ben is an exception among men of his profession, and were he a stranger to us, his ways would seem equally as wonderful as the giant's. His judgment on matters pertaining to his sphere of life is seldom at fault; and I must see him yet to-night and ascertain his opinion of affairs, and know whether or not it would be advisable to look after the safety of Father St. Ule and his daughter. The outlaws and Indians may make a descent upon their cabin, and then, poor Sybil! God only knows what fate would be hers. But by the way, Wilma, was Sybil at the carnival?"

"I think not. She told me yesterday that her health was not likely to admit of her going out. I looked for her among the masqueraders, but if she was there, I did not recognize her. But, Nathan, do you know who that Woman in White was?"

"I do not, nor could I find a person that did know her. But my opinion is, Wilma, that she is one of Syl Garnett's accomplices. She spoke to me once as she swept past me on the lake, but the ring of skates and confusion consequent upon the sudden appearance of that giant drowned the tones of her voice so that I could not recognize it."

"Oh, dear!" Wilma suddenly cried, clinging closer to her lover's arm, "I can not help shuddering, Nathan, when I think of the fate I so narrowly escaped. And just to think of it; while, in the past two weeks, I have been looking forward to this night with joyous anticipations, I never dreamed that others were plotting against me. God bless him who

came as the King of Winter! I shall pray for him, as always do for you, Nathan."

Nathan Reeve gazed down into the pretty face of the little creature clinging so fondly to his arm. His heart was too full of love and admiration for utterance, but his eyes spoke the words his lips refused, in the silent yet eloquent language of love. To hear that those sweet lips prayed for him was a silent declaration of the great love that she bore him. And as he reflected over the events of the past few weeks, he thought that those prayers might have been instrumental in guarding him from the perils of the woods, for surely the Great Father could not turn a deaf ear to the supplications of a heart so pure, innocent and sincere. But as the youth's mind changed from the past to the future, a change came over his spirit, and a look of bitterness and anguish clouded his face. In silence they walk on, and soon arrived at the door of Wilma's home. With a fond kiss, Nathan bid his sweetheart good-night and tore himself away as though some thing desperate was tugging at his heart-strings. And so there was.

While hurrying through the village back toward the lake, he met the Italian, de Vasco, of whom he inquired:

"Can you tell me where I will find Bowie-knife Ben?"

"I left him at Burky's Exchange, but by this time he and O'Ray are off, up north," replied de Vasco.

"Indeed?" responded Nathan, regretfully. "I am sorry he is gone; but I must find him—I must see him this night—I need him. What course did he take, Mr. de Vasco?"

"He was going north from Fall Lake to follow the trail of a party of Indians and a dog-sledge upon which the body of Foss was carried away. They may be absent a week; at least, each one went into Burky's and got a couple flasks of brandy, a supply of ammunition and dried venison to do them several days."

"Then I must follow them," replied Nathan.

"It's not safe to be out alone to-night, young man. There are dangers around that only the experienced can avert," said de Vasco.

"I care not for dangers. I must overtake Bowie-knife Ben, or die in the attempt. You have no idea, Mr. de Vasco, what this night's festivities have developed; and not one of us has anything like a tangible idea of who were in our midst during the carnival."

"I presume not, signior, and in one sense of the word, the carnival must be voted a tragical failure."

"Yes; it gave our enemies an advantage from which may arise serious consequences. But I am wasting time that's precious to me, de Vasco. I must find Bowie-knife Ben."

The young borderman hurried on home, and procuring his rifle and side-arms, repaired to Burky's Exchange, where he procured a small flask of brandy, an indispensable article to the Border hunter when exposed to the rigors of a northern winter.

Nathan took his way toward the lake after leaving the store. There was a secret buried in his breast—a secret which seemed to impel him rapidly forward with a volition that was involuntary, while his face assumed that downcast, clouded expression which comes of a heart being weighed down with mental tortures and struggling emotions.

CHAPTER X.

BEN AND LARRY ON THE TRAIL.

BOWIE-KNIFE BEN and Larry O'Ray were several miles away from the settlement before Nathan Reeve had started in search of them.

Ignorant of his presence being required by any one, Ben pushed northward from the lake in hopes of tracking to its destination the dog-sledge upon which the body of the dead outlaw had been spirited away by the Woman in White. And wherever the sledge was found he also expected to find the Mexican and the five Indians, for there was not a doubt in his mind but that the woman was Syl Garnett's friend, and that the Mexican was Syl Garnett himself.

The scouts had no difficulty in finding the trail where the sledges and outlaws left the lake. Although there was a thick crust upon the snow, the track of the sled-runners could be seen, as could, also, the impression of the Mexican's boot-heels. The trail ran due north, with now and then a

deviation to avert a steep hill or dense thicket of undergrowth; and without a minute's hesitation the hunters set off to follow it, moving with remarkable rapidity considering the disadvantages they were compelled to undergo.

"Arrah, now!—and if wees can continey on this way fur a week, we'll catch the bloody spalpeens before another hour," said Larry, both his tongue and legs growing nimble from the frequent visits of a flask of brandy from his breast-pocket to his lips; for, to tell the truth, Larry's greatest fault was his tendency toward intemperance.

"I hav'n't as much hopes, this holy minit, of overtakin' them as I had when we started," replied Bowie-knife Ben.

"And why not, mon?"

"Why, you can see the sky is growin' hazy, and—"

"Och!—and if that isn't a good 'un, tho'! It's yer eyes that's ghrown' hazy, mon, with lookin' for the bottom of yer flask."

"You'll see that in less than two hours the moon 'll not only be concealed, but this trail 'll be rubbed totally outen existence."

"Wirrah! and how the devil, mon, will the thrail git rhubed out?"

"It 'll be snowin' like 'tarnal sin," replied Ben, earnestly, "in less'n an hour. I told 'em the day was too warm and soft-like to last long. I knowed it war a weather-breeder and prognosticated snow afore the carnival was over; and I'd a-hit it too, if the fun hadn't a-bin broke up as it war, so soon. It arn't midnight yit. This is an awful uncertain kentry, Irisher. A sunshiny hour may be follered by one of thunder and blixes. Thar's nothin' sartain, nothin' sartain in Minnysoty weather. But mind, I say, we'll have snow afore two hours, or I'll knock under that I'm no prophet. Then, don't you see, the trail 'll be kivered up; and we left in the lurch."

"We'll have *poteen*, so we will, bedad," replied Larry, with an air of satisfaction.

Ben's predictions of the weather proved true, only that it commenced snowing sooner than he had anticipated. At first the snow fell in large, damp flakes, most of which lodged on the tangled branches overhead, so that the scouts were enabled to follow the trail for some time after the storm had set in. But, finally, the flakes became dryer, smaller and denser, and sifting down through the laden boughs, obliterated the trail entirely.

The scouts were now in a scope of scattering timber, where the view around them was but little obstructed, and when Ben was, at the last moment, compelled to give up all attempts to follow the trail, his keen eye caught the faint glimmer of a light far ahead. Pointing it out to his companion, he said:

"Blessed diskivery! Yander's the source of the Nile! Thar we'll be apt to find 'em tormented gourd-heads camped. They've stopped fur the night, I 'low, thinkin' as what the night and storm 'll be a safeguard to their trail and camp. But eat me snakes if I don't see 'bout it! And now, Irisher, stiffen yer lip, bristle up and step like a shadder, and I'll du'st if we don't have some right lively, slap-up fun."

"Bedad, then, and s'pose mees take a wee bit of a pull from me flask, for to shtiddy me narves, and rhouse the lions and tigers in me," said O'Ray, and suiting the action to the word he produced a small flask which he uncorked and placed to his lips. A long and continued gurgling not only attested the ecstatic joy of the man, but threatened the entire contents of the flask. There was, however, a draught left, and this was passed to Ben, who seldom indulged in spirits unless it was absolutely necessary.

Having thus "narved up," as Larry expressed it, the flask was returned to its receptacle, and then the two began moving toward the light, observing all the precaution possible. They sheered around to the west so as not to approach the camp from the south, knowing that if it were the camp of the Mexican and Indians, they would station a guard south of the camp to prevent the approach of followers.

As the scouts continued on, it was observed that the light was gradually growing dimmer, as if being slowly extinguished by the falling snow; and as no signs of life could be seen moving or stationed about it, Ben came to the conclusion that it was deserted. As they drew nearer, it was found that he was right in his conclusion. Not a sign of life was visible about the fire which was now reduced to a heap of red, glowing coals.

Ben reconnoitered the vicinity with circumspection, and when fully assured that no enemies were about, he cautiously approached the fire, followed by O'Ray.

A large space had been cleared of snow under a wide-branching tree, and in the center of this spot the fire was smoldering. A glance at the moccasin tracks around in the snow told the old borderman that it was an Indian bivouac, and had not long been deserted. But why it had been left, he could not conceive, unless the enemy that they had been following had passed that way and induced the Indians to go off with them. It was evident that the Indians had intended to remain there all night when they had encamped, for a large pile of dry fuel was lying near, no doubt having been gathered in for the purpose of keeping up a fire through the night.

Feeling satisfied that the camp was deserted for good, and having considered everything connected with the situation, Bowie-knife Ben came to the conclusion that the only reasonable course for them to pursue was to take possession of the deserted camp and remain there until morning. He felt assured that they could do so with impunity, while to continue on might lead them far off from the trail.

So Ben replenished the fire from the supply of fuel already at hand. Larry unrolled his blanket, and wrapping it about his shoulders seated himself against the trunk of the tree with an air of relief.

"Now let the jade av a shtorm flirt her skirts, if she wants to; Larry O'Ray is happy as a boiled owl, so he is, be jabers!"

"You're gittin' top-heavy, Larry, with too much corn-juice," said Ben, pushing aside the snow to make a place to spread his blanket.

"Nary bit av it, me honey. Larry O'Ray never see'd the day that *poteen* could down him; but, by me faith, Benny, mees come very noigh forgotten' one thing that occurred at the carnival to-night."

"I reckon!" exclaimed Ben; "what war it?"

"Shteady, bedad, and mees 'll tell yees, Benny, fur mees see'd it wid me own eyes and ears. Begorra, and it war the bla'g'ard in the Mexican duds that walked straighth up to some other chap on the ice and shlapped him a dab on the soide av the head."

"You're blowin' now, Larry," said Ben, incredulously.

"Divil the bit av it, Benny. It's the howly truth, if mees niver told it before."

"Wall, then, what follered the slap?" asked Ben, growing more interested.

"Ay, now, and bless yer sowl, and the fellow that got shlapped jist buckeled roight up to the Mexican dog, and says he, in a wickedish voice, 'Villain, I will resent this insult at a proper toime and place.' Then says old Mexico, 'Name yer toime and tools and place.' 'To-morry noight, I'll meet you, villain, on this lake; our seconds can arrange the preliminaries,' said the insulted gent. 'All roight; I'll meet ye,' reploied Mexy, and then the two went on skating as though nothing 'd happened in the world. That's the shtory, Benny."

"Then you didn't know the men?" said Ben.

"Not a bit more'n a hog, Benny. Their masks hid their faces; and their voices war so full of mad that I couldn't recognoize them."

"Tor-ments!" exclaimed Ben, in surprise; "to-morry night, then, a duel is to be fit on the ice of Fall Lake! Dog my buttons, if I wouldn't like to know whether any of our boys have a hand in it. I'd like to be thar, too, and mebbe will be; but dod burn it! I'd like to know how many scrapes that 'ere carnival 'll be the cause of? A duell, wal, I wish I war one of the principals, with choice of weapons; I'd say bowies at ten paces, every time."

"Och! and if it war Larry O'Ray, he'd say jimmy-johns full av *poteen*, to be thrown at each other arter they were emptied by the principals, so he would."

Ben laughed in a low, silent manner at the Irishman's remark, and then replied:

"Come to fightin' with whisky, Larry, you'd beat every time."

"Wouldn't mees, though?"

"Yes, whisky is bread to some."

"More'n that, Benny, for bread is only the shtaff av life, wholie whisky is life itself."

"I'm sorry, Larry, that a man of your sense is sich a worshiper of liquor, for don't you know the missionaries say it 'biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder?!"

"I don't believe it, Benny, and the mon that says—"

At a motion of Ben, the Irishman ceased talking. The scout started to his feet, and shading his eyes from the glare

of the light with his open palm, gazed out into the gloom beyond the radius of light.

Down from the hills before him came the low wail of a human voice, as if in agony.

"Heavens!" cried Ben.

"Howly Mother, and phat is it?" cried O'Ray, starting up and grasping his rifle.

As if in answer to his question, a fierce blast of wind swept down from the highlands of the north, bringing again to his ears that wail of agony and distress:

"Oh, must I die thus?"

"Never, never, while Bowie-knife Ben's head's warm!" exclaimed our hero, and he sprung out into the storm and went lancing away through the driving sleet and Egyptian gloom like a frightened deer, guided by those awful wails of distress of some perishing human creature.

CHAPTER XI.

JEDUTHAN TURK.

So sudden had been Bowie-knife Ben's departure from camp that he had disappeared from sight in the night and storm before Larry could see the course he took. With a muttered exclamation, the Hibernian scout turned back and seated himself to await the return of his companion. A true sense of his lonely situation now became fully impressed on his mind, and as a natural consequence, misgivings of an ominous nature were conjured up in his brain. Larry was not a coward, by any means, nor was he a novice in the lore of the border. But he was wanting in that self-control and silent precaution so characteristic of the born frontiersman. Being naturally of a fun-loving and jovial disposition, he was reckless of dangers and regardless of consequences, often sacrificing golden opportunities for the sake of perpetrating a joke on a friend; or enjoying a season of amusement and fun. But now that he found himself entirely alone, he became, for once at least, seriously imbued with the situation and its surroundings. Perhaps the liquor he had imbibed had something to do in bringing this change over his spirits; or perchance the wild caprices of the storm, the weird crackling of the fire, and the wavering of the sickly light, mingled with that mournful cry of distress from out in the storm, had wrought upon his mind presentiments of an alarming nature. He finally fell into a kind of a mental stupor filled with a hundred wild vagaries and conflicting emotions, from which he was aroused, by-and-by, by the crunch of snow beneath heavy footfalls. He glanced up and saw Bowie-knife Ben issue from the darkness, fairly staggering under a heavy burden that he bore in his arms—a burden which a glance told him was the form of a human being.

"Howly Vargin! fwhat in the name av the great Adorable have yees got now, Benny, dear?" he cried, starting to his feet.

"Spread a blanket down and you'll see," replied Ben; and when the Irishman had complied with his request, he deposited his unconscious burden upon the blanket.

"Och—Howly Mother!—and it's a mon—a rheal whoite mon, as I'm a born Irishman!" the Irish scout exclaimed, as he gazed down upon the rime-covered face of a little old man, who, from all appearances, was entirely lifeless. "And who the saints am it, Benny?"

"You know as much 'bout it as I do," replied Ben.

The lifeless stranger was a man of some fifty years of age, judging by appearances. He was small of stature, and dressed in a borderman's suit of buck-skin, fur cap and woolen underclothes. His long yellow hair was matted in frozen locks about his head and covered with rime, while his short, stubby whiskers, of a grizzly-gray color, were filled with snow and ice, plentifully mixed with frozen tobacco-juice. Scraggy, beetling brows overhung the now-closed eyes, and these, with the sharp, hawk-bill, Roman nose, the unnaturally large mouth, gave the man's face an expression both comical and ridiculous. In fact, the facial muscles seemed to have been frozen or petrified while the man was engaged in a fit of hearty laughter, the comical expression of which death itself could not harden. Withal, the man was an odd specimen of humanity; and who he was, and where he came from, neither of the scouts could form the faintest conception.

"Is the critter dead, Ben?" asked Larry, trying to be scrupulous.

"Nary dead," replied Ben; "he's only frozen to death; and by playin' on him right pearly, I think we can fetch him around."

The two scouts went to work to restore the man to life, with an energy that attested their kind anxiety for the unfortunate stranger. He was in a dangerous condition, having become stupefied by the cold, and since the scout had found him, not a word had escaped his lips. But that those cries of distress—so strong and loud—should become so suddenly hushed, gave rise to a question of doubt in Ben's mind.

"The old chap's about winked out," said Ben, tearing open the bosom of the unconscious man's shirt; "he's been lost and got cold, and then sleepy and top heavy, and then keeled over into the snow; and I tell ye it's a crackin' good thing we came hereabouts. Here, jist pour a leetle of that into his mouth, and I'll rub his limbs till they strike fire;" and he handed Larry a flask of brandy which had not been touched since they had left Lakeside.

"It's a morthal shame to pour the good *potion* down a dead mon," sighed Larry, with a look of regret, as he drew the cork and reluctantly poured some of the stimulant down the man's throat.

A gasping, convulsive movement of the body followed this administration. The liquor was swallowed by an apparently great effort, and a muttered ejaculation, as if in reproof for being disturbed, escaped the man's lips.

"Begorra, and the liquor's fwhat teches a tender shpot. I sw'ar it brought a half-smile to the feller's lips. Wirra, and it would rhaise a dead mon, Benny, if he war an Oirishman; but it's a shame, to waste the fluid on this—"

"Never mind, Larry," interrupted Ben; "pour in another whistful of the essence."

Again O'Ray applied the mouth of the flask to the stranger's lips, which parted as if by a conscious volition of the man's will; and not until the last drop had been drained from the bottle did the Irishman remove the flask.

"There," Larry exclaimed, "he's got all av a half a point av the cordial down his throat, and, begorra, I b'lieve he could hold another. He's a tooth fur soothin'-syrup, Ben, and it'll take a bucketful to rhouse the owld skeesicks."

"Anuther flask 'll fetch him, I think," said Ben, slapping the stranger vigorously upon the shoulders and sides. "Jist, spill anuther bit down his gullet; here's my last flaskful, and it's dod-burned lucky I brought as much as I did."

"Divil the bit av good 'll it do us if we's have to shlop it all down this lazy Turk's mouth."

Thus complaining, he again placed a flask to the stranger's lips, when the cadaverous facial orifice of the man flew open to receive the stimulant as though he was fully conscious of what was going on, and yet totally powerless to speak, or rouse himself from the lethargic somnolence into which he had been thrown by the powerful and slumbrous influence of the rigorous cold.

"Och! and by the howly saints!" cried Larry, opprobriously; "and mees believes the bloody thaif is acting like 'possum, so I do; for didn't yees see, Benny, how natural loike that gash on his face floies open whiniver the bottle goes to his lips? Divil the bit will he git ag'in; he'll rhob us, the firty vampyre," and Larry arose and concealed the flask in the crotch of the huge forked tree under which they stood.

"Thunder!" retorted Ben; "the man's only drunk with cold and inersha. We'll fetch him around by-and-by. Say, stranger"—and he shook the man vigorously—"git up here; rouse your lazy self; don't sleep yerself to death like a opium-eater. Git up, I say!"

The stranger gave utterance to a low, savage grunt, that was expressive of displeasure at being disturbed, but he immediately relaxed into his drowsy torpor again.

"I've got to use more vigorous stimulants, I see," Ben remarked, seeing he could not awaken the sleeper; and rising to his feet, he began belaboring the man with his moccasined foot in a severe but not violent manner.

This appeared to be more efficient, for it immediately forced several angry grunts of reproof from the sleeper's lips, and as Ben continued to apply his remedy, both he and O'Ray were completely astonished by seeing the stranger spring suddenly to his feet as though nothing had ailed him!

With a "broad," comical smile, that threatened to break out in a roar of laughter, upon the rime-covered and doleful face of the man, he assumed an attitude of hostility, and in a tone of "injured innocence," demanded:

"Cuss it, ye thundered fools! do ye mean to kick and pound the life outen me? Dem it, can't a man take a le-

spectable sleep any more? It's shameful, barbarous, mean! Yer whisky wa'n't so bad while ye kept it runnin', but that durned maulin' and rubbin' and—"

" You tormented ole dead-beat!" interrupted Ben, half provoked by the sudden turn of affairs, which convinced him that he had been made the victim of a practical joke; " have you been playin' the 'possum—the fool, all this time?"

The smile, which all this time had been deepening upon the man's face, disappeared in an outburst of hearty laughter, full of the genuine ring and the kindest of feelings.

" Wal, I kind o' guess, strangers," he at length replied, " that I've a tooth for whisky, as one o' ye remarkt awhile ago, and I knewed you wouldn't 'a' been so free if ye'd knowned I didn't need it. Ye see, I knewed you'd whisky when ye fust landed, fur I see'd ye take a drink—ahem! that fust horn war remarkably delicious—deliteful! What, me freeze?—ole Jeduthan Turk freeze on sich a night as this 'ere? Nary freeze! Ho! ho! ho! It war a mighty, all-fired mean trick, but I sw'ar yer liquor war a choice article, and—" here the odd old trickster went off into another fit of laughter, that set his whole frame in a convulsion.

With a serio-comical smile upon his face, Ben regarded the man apparently in doubt as to whether to join him in hearty laughter, or kick him out of camp for his cool and deliberate imposition. But finally he came to the sober conclusion that it was only a joke, and having resolved to take it in the spirit in which it was given, he advanced, and taking the stranger's hand, said:

" All right, Jeduthan Turk; whenever a man gits Bowie-knife Ben as you have, he's welcome to what he makes out of it; and so here's to your health."

He drew a flask from his pocket, and placing it to his lips took a mild draught and then passed the bottle to Turk. The latter bowed, accepted the flask with a comical grace and " thankee," then placed it to his lips and drained it to the dregs, much to the regret and astonishment of Larry O'Ray, who, regarding the whole with open-mouthed wonder, uttered a profane exclamation.

" Splendid! de-licious!" exclaimed Turk, smacking his lips in high gusto, and nodding in an approving manner at Larry.

" Och! and I'd judge so," replied the slighted Hibernian, " tho' fur the sowl av me I couldn't swear to it, fur I didn't taste it."

" No, no, I reckon as what you don't drink, Irishman," replied Turk, his little gray eyes sparkling with mischief. " Wal, it is a bad habit—makes one a little shaky. Let the p'isen alone, Irishman, while ye can, fur when one gits addicted to it, he can't quit, and water gits to have a bad taste. Now I, Jeduthan Turk, am a moderate drinkin' man, and yit—"

" Howly Mother!" cried O'Ray. " A moderate dhrinker! Och! and if that isn't good; and if a mon that dhrinks a tubful is a moderate dhrinker, whar the devil's yer immoderate dhrinkers?"

" Why, the man that'll drink ten times as much as I will, to be sure," was Turk's reply. " But, boys, I tricked you fur yer impertinence."

" What do you mean by that?" asked Ben.

" Why, walkin' in here and takin' charge of our—my camp. That's what I mean."

" This your camp?" exclaimed Ben.

" Verily I say unto ye, it is; bet yer boots on it," Turk replied.

" You weren't alone, then," said Ben, beginning to mistrust that there was something wrong about the man, as his thoughts reverted to the moccasin-tracks he had seen around the fire when they first came to the camp.

" Weren't I, though?" replied Turk, with a comical squint of the eyes, evading a direct answer in a manner that was calculated to strengthen the suspicions in Ben's mind. " Wal, I kind o' calculate a man 'u'd be green as grass in July to be out travelin' alone to-night, I swan he would, men; and if—"

Further words were here cut short by the sight of a figure emerging from the gloom with the slow, measured gravity and catlike silence of an Indian, which, in fact, the intruder proved to be. He was a Sioux, and his painted face wore the expression of malignant cunning and base treachery. His approach, although slow, appeared to be made with impunity, and an utter disdain of the presence of Bowie-knife Ben and Larry. But it was noticed that he and Jeduthan Turk exchanged furtive and significant glances, notwithstanding the latter evinced some uneasiness at first sight of the

warrior. In the meantime, however, Ben and Larry also exchanged glances that were fully understood, and followed by a movement of the hands toward their girdles.

Then that dreadful silence, which is a precursor of a coming storm, came like the shadow of death, and brooded over the camp.

CHAPTER XII.

TITAN IN CAMP.

BOWIE-KNIFE BEN's fingers tightened upon the haft of one of those deadly weapons in his girdle; but, seeing that neither the Indian nor Turk made any demonstration, he gazed around him and out into the darkness as if expecting to see other shadowy figures appear upon the scene. But as no one came, and the two enemies before him showed no disposition to begin offensive measures, he withdrew his hand from his girdle, at the same time demanding:

" See here, Turk, I want to know how many more sich copper-skins you've got out in the woods?"

" Not another one," responded Turk, glancing at Ben, in a manner which the scout could not fully comprehend.

" Dog my cats if I like sich heathenish society; it's not healthy; it gives one a itchin' in the fingers," replied Ben. " I reckon as what one or t'other party'd better shin out, and as you claim the right to this camp, Mr. Turk, we'll leave."

" Don't be in a rush 'bout leavin', friend," said Turk, in a tone that to Ben seemed freighted with a double meaning. Larry, however, was not so observant of the man's tone, and at once put in:

" Arrah, now, Misther Tark, and yees needn't prevail on us to shtay; divil the drop av comfort 'll yees git av us again, so yees won't."

" Irishman, you shouldn't let yer mind be absorbed in the cravin's o' the stomach. Think o' yer soul's salvation and the great herearter, for the angel o' death hovers nigh."

The look that accompanied this moral admonition had the desired effect upon Larry, who turned away and at once looked to his rifle and adjusted his side weapons.

The Indian had seated himself against the trunk of the tree by this time, and with cool deliberation had produced a pipe and begun smoking. His whole bearing was one of contempt and disdain. He gazed into the fire and puffed away at his pipe with well-affected indifference as to what was going on, yet it was quite obvious to the keen eyes of Ben that he was noting every movement and drinking in every word that was said.

Once or twice our hero's eyes became fixed upon the savage, and his hand mechanically clutched one of the deadly weapons in his girdle; but a look from Jeduthan Turk each time stayed the deadly impulse of his mind. It was evident to him that Turk did not desire the savage slain, and yet he—Turk—evinced no little uneasiness since the red-skin's arrival.

The crunch of snow suddenly arrested the attention of the party, and but for the fact that the Indian glanced quickly up in surprise, Ben would have been uneasy himself. But what was danger to the Indian would not likely be so to him, and he turned toward the approaching sound and awaited the coming of the unknown.

The quick trampling of feet, like the massive tread of a stag, could be heard crashing through the snow-crust not far away; and in a few minutes two figures with stately tread appeared from the darkness in sight. Their faces and great brown eyes seemed almost human in their dimly-perceptible expressions, but the ghostly branching antlers that surmounted their heads proclaimed them animals—a pair of elks. A second glance told our friends that they were not only domesticated, but harnessed to a light sleigh, or sledge, upon which sat a huge figure wrapped in a robe of bear-skins. What it all meant, Ben could not conceive, and with an inquiring look he turned to Jeduthan Turk, and was surprised to see a light of extreme satisfaction glowing in the eye of that worthy. As if conscious of what Ben desired to know, he turned his head slightly and said, in a loud whisper:

" By jinks, it's him—Titan the Terror, I swan, it is!"

At this juncture the sledge came to a halt within the full glare of the camp-light. The robe dropped from the driver's shoulders, revealing the huge figure of a man dressed in buck-skin, and wearing a fur cap. His face was black as

midnight, and so the secret of Titan the Terror was revealed. He was an African. He was a man of giant proportions, whose size had usually been magnified one-third larger by superstitious fears. He was a mortal being—nothing more.

Quick as the lightning's flash, the eye of the giant swept over the party before him; then he coolly took up a long bow—the same which he had carried at the carnival—and fixing an arrow to it, drew the missile to the head. Then followed a sharp twang and a groan of agony. The latter issued from the lips of the Indian.

Turning, our friends beheld, to their horror, the savage tugging, with the feebleness of a dying man, at the arrow that absolutely pinned him to the tree against which he was reclining. Titan had slain him, and as all turned from the dreadful scene, the giant uttered a low, triumphant laugh, dismounted from his sledge and advanced with outstretched and open hand of friendship toward Bowie-knife, his colossal form fairly towering above those of the dwarf scout and Larry O'Ray.

CHAPTER XIII.

TITAN REVEALS HIMSELF.

THE every look and movement of the Terror of the North were sufficient evidence to Bowie knife Ben of the friendly feeling of the giant, and the scout extended his horny palm and clasped that of the mysterious man.

"How do, gemmen?" exclaimed the latter, in the unmistakable Afro-English accent, warmly shaking the scout's hand.

"Tor-ment it, man, how do ye do? but for Gor Almighty sake, what a b'ar's grip you've got," replied Ben, wincing under the pain of the giant's crushing grip.

Titan released his hand and burst into a low, soft, good-natured laugh—a laugh that dispelled every shadow of mistrust from the breast of the two scouts.

In stature the negro was nearly, if not quite, seven feet high; and his proportions otherwise were in harmony with his height. He was a model of physical manhood, fully developed in form and feature, the latter bearing striking evidence of his African descent. His movements were as easy and light as the panther's; and his great muscular, sinewy arms, massive, swelling chest, broad shoulders, and thick stout neck told of the prodigious strength of the man.

Ben regarded him with a kind of admiring awe; and it was no wonder, he thought, that people feared him and coupled his name with the dark and mysterious. All the past events with which the giant was connected, passed in rapid review before his mind. The shadowy figure that passed them in the storm on the prairie; the strangled red-skin; the lost trail; and the tragedy at the carnival—all flashed across his mind in a moment. He saw, lying upon the sledge, the skates and mask of icicles worn by the giant at the lake that night, and by these he knew that the man was just on his way home, wherever that home might be.

"'Bout to get into trubble, gemmen?" the giant asked, glancing from Ben to Larry.

"Dog my kats if I know, stranger," responded Ben. "If you'd pin us to a tree like ye did that critter, I reckon as what one'd call that a cussed little trouble."

"Bowie-knife Ben is afeard ob nobody, dat I knows," replied Titan. "I'se seed him throw de bowie-knife when he nebber dream dis chile war 'bout. I'se knowed Bowie knife dis long time, but dis am de fustest time we ebber met to 'change words. I knows, kase I'se a little hefty and not as handsum as a charm, dat I'se 'siderated a monstrosity—a gobling—de debbil—a spirit, and de Lor' only knows what else. But, I's jis' a mortal man, I sw'ar I is, boys; you can try me—pinch me, bite me—eat me if you wants to."

"Hurra, now, and that's a good wan," exclaimed Larry, "and forty hungry b'ars couldn't ate yer carcass that's like unto an elephant's, so it is."

"I'se not very little, stranger, I admit," replied Titan. "De good Lor' seed fit to pile it on heavy, and I sha'n't complain. I'se acted queer and skeered lots ob folks, I knows, but den I'se had an object in it all. I'se killed gobs ob Ingings, but I nebber hurt an innocent man, woman or chile, nor I nebber kill innocent beasts fur de fun ob de thing. I kill Ingings' 'ca'se de enemies ob peace and civilizashing Dar am little going on in de council lodge ob de Ingings but what dis nigger knows it; but had dat Ingings," pointing to the lifeless body of the savage. "lived, de charm ob my su-

cess 'd been busted, and Titan, de Terror ob de North, would 'a' bin nuthin' to de red-skins but a big nigger," and as he concluded, the giant burst into a fit of hearty laughter that shook his massive frame as if with convulsions.

"Wal, stranger," replied Bowie-knife Ben, when the negr had subsided into silence, "I'm tor-mented glad thar's an understanding atwixt us, fur that little killin' affair at the lake to-night has set everybody in a stew."

"Dat's jis' what I 'spec's, but den it jis' what I wants, too," replied Titan. "But, you sees, Ben, dat I finds out dat a pack ob debbils war gwine to de carnival to steal somebody's gal, and so ole massa says: Tibe, fix up as de King ob Winter, and go down to de carnival and shoot de Ingings wid de b'ar's claws dead, fur he wur to steal the gal."

Speaking of his *master's* orders, recalled to Ben's mind the conversation that had occurred between him and de Vasco that night, during which the Italian had expressed a belief that Titan was a negro—the very man he was in hunt of, and who was under conviction for the murder of his master in Tennessee. The officer's suspicion had proven correct on one point. Titan was a negro; and there was not a doubt left in Ben's mind but that he was the sought-for murderer, Tiberius Rado. And with these facts before him, the scout began debating with himself as to what course he should pursue. Fortunately, Titan came to his relief and settled the matter.

"Dar am a fellah at Lakeside," he said, "dat calls his se'f de Vasco, and says he's a Italying. Now, dat ain't so. When you see him ag'in, jis' tell him dat his name am Ezra Toole, and dat I knows what he's in dis country for. But tell him he'll not catch Tibe Rado alive fur de murder ob his ole massa. No, sah; dis chile know his business, and whenever de time comes, Tibe Rado 'll show hisse'f like a man. It am not fur myself dat I'se here, but fur one I thinks a mighty heap ob. I never murdered Massa Longfelt—no, sah, I sw'ar to de Lord I didn't. I knows whar ole massa am. You jis' tell Vasco dat. And jis' tell him to look fur de other party in dat Tennessee affair."

"Wal, nigger, I'll do it with the greatest anemosity," responded Ben, "and mebby now you can tell me whar Syl Garnett's den is."

"No, I don't know 'zactly; but will know 'fore long, fur dar am a chicken in dat coop dis nigger wants to pull de tail feather out ob."

"Well, nigger," said Ben, "to be frank with you, we're in s'arch of Garnett's den; and b'lieve we'd a-found it if it hadn't commenced stormin'."

"Go ahead, Ben, and always count dis little morsel on your side. You can jis' call me de Babe in de Woods, or de Big Nigger, or Titan, or Tibe Rado, or anything; and whenever you knock at de door ob dis nigger's home, you'll find de latch-string out; and if I'se not dar, jis' come *dat* to ole massa"—and he made a peculiar sign with his right hand—"and I'll bet you'll be keered fur. But, gemmen, dar's danger in dese woods, and dis chile's advice is to leave dese diggings while it's snowing so dat your tracks will be hid. Dat dead Ingings got gobs ob friends in de woods, and dey'll be 'round soon. Guess dis little nigger 'll leave now, boys; so here goes."

He turned, and stepping into his sledge, seated himself, and drawing his robe around him, took up the lines that were attached to the antlers of the elks, and like a shadow shot away into the night and storm.

"A doggoned queer feller, after all," mused Ben, as the giant disappeared from sight; "and, Lordy, what a giant! But then I'll bet he can be friz to with safety, and—"

"Oh!—och, Benny, dear!" suddenly cried the Irishman, "and by the Howly Saints, that ould whisky-barrhel, Jeduthan Turk, has slid out!"

True enough, Jeduthan Turk was gone. He must have stolen away while Ben and Larry's attention was centered upon Titan; and what was the most surprising and provoking of all, especially to Larry, was to find that the queer, mysterious old rascal had carried off the flask of brandy that the Irishman had concealed, as he supposed, in the crotch of the tree.

CHAPTER XIV.

CAPTAIN COLEMAN'S PARTY.

BOWIE-KNIFE BEN and Larry O'Ray at once broke camp and set off for other quarters more congenial to their safety. They had journeyed but a short distance when the report of

fire-arms broke suddenly upon their ears, echoing in sullen intonations through the storm.

"Torment it!" exclaimed Ben, coming to a sudden halt, "that's sumthin' up out yonder. Like as anyway, a free fight are goin' on. S'pose we gee off and look into it!"

"Bedad, and I niver felt s' much loike fought as mees do this blessed minit', and iver since that ould lobber-jaw took our last dhrap av glory. Wirra! there goes another ould rhipping bang."

True enough, the discharge of rifles had become quite frequent now, and it was evident that a conflict was going on. Anxious to know the meaning of it, and who were the parties engaged, Ben and Larry hurried off and soon reached the vicinity of the battle.

They found themselves on the summit of a ridge overlooking a deep, narrow valley which Ben knew to be but sparsely wooded with stunted pines. The fight appeared to be going on in this valley, but the darkness and whirling storm were so blinding that everything was hidden from view. They could, however, detect the occasional flash of a rifle, whose report would come upon the wings of the storm, leaving not a single doubt as to the location of the conflict.

The scouts continued their reconnaissance around the valley, for some time, but could make no discovery further than that there were Indians in the vicinity who were evidently besieging enemies in the valley.

Daylight finally came, and with the darkness the storm disappeared. The sun rose, warm and bright above the snow-clad hills and valleys, rolling back the curtain of darkness that had shut from view, so long, the contested vale. A scene quite surprising was revealed to the eyes of the scouts.

In the center of the valley stood two large, white tents surrounded by a wall of logs six feet in height. This little defense was again surrounded by immense snow-drifts. No sign of life was visible about the camp, but upon the plain to the southward several Indians could be seen, grouped around a fire, evidently watching the little fort.

At first Ben believed that the camp was deserted, but a thin wreath of smoke curling up on the crispy morning air from the apex of one of tents, showed that the huts were inhabited. Who were the occupants? He was satisfied that it was a party of white hunters from some neighboring settlement, and at once resolved to run the risk of approaching their camp. Acting upon this resolution, he crept from his concealment and made a dash for the little fort, closely followed by Larry O'Ray.

The Indians saw them the moment they debouched from their concealment, and rushed forward with a yell and endeavored to cut them off from the encampment. But the besieged were upon the alert, and at once covered the scout's advance by opening a brisk fire upon the savages, who were compelled to fall beyond rifle-range.

The next moment Ben and Larry were received with shouts of triumph into the camp of the besieged. The first and only face among the latter was recognized as that of Nathan Reeve; all the rest, of whom there were six, were entire strangers to both Ben and Larry.

"Vipers and alligators!" exclaimed Ben, as they leaped down behind the barricade of logs and snow, "that war a sprightly little run, strangers, I sw'ar it war—hello, Natty Reeve!—you here, my boy—how be that?"

"I started out in search of you last night, and had the good fortune to run across these gentlemen with whom I've been compelled to stay ever since. This, Bowie-knife Ben, is Captain Sydney Graham."

"You don't say! Howdy, Captain Graham?" exclaimed the little hunter, advancing with proffered hand; "I reckon as what you be in a tormented ti'tish place, now ar'n't you?"

"We are closely besieged by a party of Sioux that seem bent on getting our scalps," replied Captain Graham. "However, I'm inclined to think they'll be disappointed unless we have overestimated our ability to cope with them. At least, we have decided to remain here a week or two until the weather becomes more settled; then we calculate to move up into the vicinity of Otter Tail Lake."

Captain Graham and his party were all young men, none possibly over five and twenty years of age; and although they were habited in the rude yet comfortable costume of the hunter, it was clearly evident that they were not bordermen by profession. All bore testimony of the refinement and culture of civilization. They were equipped with rifles, pistols

and knives of the latest pattern; also with hand sledges, skates and snow-shoes, all of which proclaimed them amateur sportsmen off in the wilds of the North-west for a season of sport and adventure. All were fine specimens of physical manhood, with frank, open faces, upon which was stamped the glow of health and the spirit of youthful adventure.

"I consider it quite fortunate our having you with us at last," continued Graham, after the hunter had been introduced to each of the party. "We've been looking for you a fortnight or more. You see we are boys out from home for the first time, and we need a guide, protector and guardian. We had set our caps for you, as your reputation as a hunter, scout and gentleman bears the strongest test of all in this country. We came down this way on purpose to hunt you up, for you see we want to see the elephant and the wilds of Minnesota, and have set apart the whole year for the purpose. The want of an experienced guide, however, came very near getting ourselves into trouble last night, and but for the appearance of Mr. Reeve, we may have lost our hair."

"Arrah, now, and it would 'a' larnt yees a good lesson," Larry O'Ray chimed in.

"Verily it would, I admit," replied Graham, with a smile, "but I'm afraid that it would have been so severe that it would have done us little good. We were not aware that the Sioux came so far north at this season of the year until Mr. Reeve informed us that we were well in upon the contested grounds of the Indians, and the advance posts of civilization."

"Ya-as, thar's a tormented sight of good and bad blood spilt in these diggin's," replied Ben, "and I reckon as what if you stay here a year you'll have a right skittish time of it—jist sich fun as me and O'Ray here are continerally huntin' for."

"Then if you have no previous engagements, we want your services—wouldn't care if we could get you both," replied Graham. "It is our aim to have a general good time regardless of expense and dangers, and being fully cognizant of our inability to enjoy the border without a good guide, we are anxious to obtain you as that benefactor; now, what say you?"

"And will you have a dhrap av anything along for colds in the throat and sich?" asked Larry, with a comical grin.

"We have several small casks of excellent brandy and bourbon cached with our supplies, up near Otter Tail Lake."

"Hurrah, begob, and yees are the laddies for mees. Yees can count me one on the hunt and six whin it comes to the dimmy-john."

"Wal, I reckon as what—" began Ben, but he was interrupted by Nathan Reeve, who said:

"Ben, before you decide I want to speak with you."

The two stepped aside, when Nathan continued:

"Ben, I want your services till midnight of the coming night."

"Why, boy, ye ar'n't gorin' to marry, be you? Don't want me to stand up with you, do you?"

"No, Ben; I will tell you: I was grossly insulted by that person in the garb of the Mexican ranchero at the carnival last night; and at twelve o'clock to-night the matter is to be adjus'ed."

"Torments and furies, Natty!—is this the truth, 'pon honor?" exclaimed Ben. "Then Larry was right; he said he heard pie-crust words tarminate in 'rangements for a duel; and of all others, Natty, I never dreamp you war one of 'em."

"Yes, I am the injured party. The Mexican struck me a blow, without warning or provocation, in the face; and to-night either he or I must die, and I want you to see me through the scrape. It was to hunt you up that led me out into the storm last night."

"Mercy, mercy, boy," exclaimed Ben, as if struggling to overcome some inward emotion, "you can count on me t the death, but it'll be like goin' to your funeral. I've an ijee that Mexico is a dead shot. But you've got the ch'ice of weepons, and I wish to thunder you could flip a bowie-knife as I can, then you'd be so sure of killing Mexico that it wouldn't be any use of your goin' to meet him at all. You don't know, then, why he struck you? Don't know who he is, do you?"

"I have no idea who he is, or why he struck me."

"Singulär, now, ain't it, Natty? You must be in his way, I reckon; but then that war lots of singular things occurred

at the lake last night. That carnival war a bad thing arter all, wasn't it?"

"I don't know, Ben; it brought about the disclosure of a plot to abduct Wilma Meredith that might have been successful under any other circumstances. Besides, it will put the settlers at Lakeside on their guard. They have been too negligent of their own safety; and I have said all along that they would suffer for their carelessness. Syl Garnett has the whole Indian tribe to back him up, and one well-directed blow might lay every settler low in death. I am half inclined to think my foe is one of Garnett's robbers. As to Titan, the—"

"Thar, boy," interrupted Ben, "I war jist goin' to tell you that I know all 'bout Titan—had a shake of his half-acre fist last night."

"Indeed!"

"And b'lieve it, won't you, he's nothin' more'n a big nigger, and a friend of our'n. He's a queer big brat, and—Tor-ment!"

The latter exclamation was occasioned by the sibilation of a bullet so close to the hunter's cheek that a sharp, stinging pain was produced. The shot had been fired by a savage, who had crept up under cover of a clump of snow-laden bushes, to within easy rifle range of the camp.

"Durn a man that can't shoot any better'n that, say I. He ort to die on the spot—it's a disgrace to the border. I sw'ar it be, and I'll give him a pass to the happy huntin'-grounds, by crackey if I don't."

He swung his long rifle to his shoulder and took aim at the little cloud of smoke that still hung on the air, where it had puffed from the red skin's rifle. He pressed the trigger, and the clear, ringing report of the piece split the air. A tufted head was seen to pop up above the bushes the instant the shot was fired, and although no sound was heard, it was quite certain that the Indian had been wounded if not killed. At least, the party had conclusive evidence that no more shots came from behind that bush.

The little fort was so constructed, and its approach so guarded by immense snow-piles, that it was impossible for a savage to obtain a shot at one of its defenders without exposing himself on the hillside.

The amateur hunters had fortified themselves for a two-weeks' stay in the valley, or longer in case the inclement weather did not subside. They were well stocked with provisions, and provided with everything necessary to protect them from the rigors of the weather. Their rifles were repeaters, which alone made them equal, in a contest with fire arms, to two-score men.

Bowie-knife Ben foresaw a season of royal sport with this party. He had studied each face and found therein the genuine elements of manly courage and that spirit and love of adventure so characteristic of youthful blood. Such a party Ben delighted in leading. There was an inestimable pleasure to him in knowing that men, who were superior to him in intellectual worldly knowledge, were forced to look to him for advice and instruction in a matter where "book learning" would be of no avail. At the same time he was not rude nor conceited in his authority and power; on the contrary, he exercised them in a way that made it pleasant to all.

"Boys," the frisky little hunter finally said, "after to-night I think I can spend a few months with you in seein' the elefantee. But, mind ye now, I'll put ye through a course of sprouts not soon to be forgotten."

"Good! good! that's what we want," chorused the sportsmen, and the matter being thus permanently settled, attention was turned to the preparation of breakfast, Ben keeping a close watch on the red-skins that were maneuvering around the valley in the woods.

None of the party left the little fort that day, but as soon as darkness again infolded the valley and forest in its shadows, Ben and Nathan took their departure toward Fall Lake, there to meet the Mexican masquerader in deadly combat.

Larry O'Ray remained at the camp with the young sportsmen.

CHAPTER XV.

"PISTOLS FOR TWO."

THE night was clear and still. The moon and stars looked to earth from a sky whose crispy brightness was in keeping with the keen, frosty air.

Fall Lake, glimmering like a bed of molten silver in the moonbeams, was wrapped in the deep silence of midnight, when forth from the shadows that bordered the west margin of the lake two figures issued onto the ice. One was dressed in the garb worn by the Mexican masquerader of the night previous, even to the bearded mask upon his face. His companion was also *en mask*. Both wore skates, and with slow, measured strides they moved toward the center of the lake.

Scarcely, however, had they appeared in sight ere two other figures upon skates emerged from the east shore and approached the center of the lake also. They were Bowie knife Ben and Nathan Reeve, come to meet the Mexican and his man in the previously-arranged affair of honor.

As the parties neared each other, they finally came to a halt about fifty paces apart. Ben and the Mexican's second advanced then until they met. Each one knew what the other was there for, and so no idle words were exchanged in arranging the preliminaries for the fight.

Their work was soon done; pistols were to be the weapons, and the distance was to be decided by the combatants themselves. They were to be stationed two hundred yards apart, and having their skates on, they were to advance toward each other at a given signal, each one to fire while advancing and whenever he felt assured that the intervening distance would warrant a deadly shot. If both missed, the affair was to be repeated until one or the other fell or failed to come to time. It was a novel way of dueling, but the idea met the favor of both principals, who at once took their positions upon the lake, two hundred paces apart.

Ben was to give the signal to advance by firing his rifle. The hunter stood near Nathan, upon whose face a deep seriousness had settled, but no look of regret nor fear did he betray.

A deep silence reigned. Not a voice broke the stillness of the midnight hour upon the lake. It seemed as though the four had seized upon the same moment for reflection. At length Ben said:

"Boy, this is a tormented ticklish piece of work. I sw'ar I wish it war me 'stead of you, I sw'ar I do. You see, I've been runnin' long down the road that leads to death, nigh onto forty years, and I hain't got kith nor kin to mourn for me. If you fall, Natty, ah's me!—that poor little thing 'll weep and weep herself to death. But you must keep a stiff upper lip, lad, a clear eye and a stiddy nerve. Don't be in a hurry to fire; when you do, feel for old Mexico's heart."

"If I should fall, Ben, don't fail to do as I requested of you to-day," said Nathan, in a voice unmoved by apprehension.

"I'll do it, Natty, I'll do it, though it bu'sts my own heart. But the longer you wait, the unsteadier yer nerve will git, so here goes, Natty."

The trapper elevated the muzzle of his rifle and fired into the air. In prolonged reverberations the report swelled out on the crisp, steely night, gathering volume as the echoes took up the sound and carried it back and forth amid the hills.

With slow, measured strides the combatants start toward each other. They move faster and faster as the distance between grows shorter and shorter. Their fingers are upon the triggers of their weapons. Their eyes are riveted upon each other's form; slowly their right hands are raised to a level with the eye—another moment and the fate of one or both will be sealed.

Bowie-knife Ben stands motionless, biting his lip in an agony of suspense. With burning impatience he watches their approach, knowing that each stride carries one or the other, if not both, nearer to death. His suspense increases as the distance between the foes grows shorter. Gradually the two distinctive sounds of their ringing skates are blended into one; the hunter sees two flashes, and the report of two pistols as one quavers upon the night.

The affair was over. A load was lifted from Ben's heart and a shout of joy and relief burst from his lips. Neither of the duelists fell, nor did either utter a word or make a movement indicative of having been wounded. They swept past each other, the Mexican coming on toward Ben, and Nathan continuing on toward his adversary's friend. Before the Mexican reached Ben, however, he checked his speed, circled around to the right and started back. Ben looked for Nathan to do likewise, but to his surprise the youth turned and with a swift, reeling gait swept away toward the north, and disappeared from sight.

Ben grew uneasy. He feared, after all, that Nathan had been wounded; however, the arrangements in the affair of honor would not admit of his leaving his post, and for several minutes he stood waiting in an agony of suspense the return of his friend. But the youth came not—the time was up; and with a ringing laugh of triumph, the Mexican and his second turned upon their heels and left the lake.

"Torment the luck, are the boy killed?" muttered the scout, in a tone of asperity. "I know he's not got skeered and racked out—no, he may have been wounded and 's gone off to die. Torment it at all, I must go this holy instanter and see about the lad."

He glided away across the lake, following as near as possible the course taken by Nathan. He could not find the trail of the youth, for the whole surface of the lake was covered with a cob-web of skate-marks; but he was moving on toward the northern side of the lake, his mind filled with many vague apprehensions; when the sight of a dark speck upon the ice arrested his attention. He stopped, and stooping down, examined it.

"My God! it's blood—fresh blood! The boy's wounded!"

He started up, and a sigh that deepened almost into a groan of agony escaped his lips. He ran his eyes over the lake and along the dark, wooded shore before him. No sign of life was visible. A deep, oppressive silence brooded over the surrounding spot. Nathan was wounded; of this there was not a doubt in the mind of the little hunter, and fearing his life might be depending upon the prompt ministrations of a friendly hand, he resumed his search. At every step he could see those dark spots of blood, and by them, he was enabled to follow the youth's trail. He went on, and had just entered the shadows near the bank, when a pool of blood upon the ice brought him to a stand.

Here Nathan had fallen. The ice was spattered over with the crimson blood as though he had been rolling and tossing in great agony after he fell. A careful examination of the ice around, however, revealed the fact that the youth had either been ruthlessly dragged away by some one, or else he had crawled away himself, dragging his limbs through the blood and smearing it in streaks across the ice. The gory trail was quite plain. It did not go ashore, but continued along the margin of the lake and finally entered the channel or creek that connects Fall Lake with the Sauk river. Ben followed it on until it reached the river; when he found it turned up that stream. He turned and followed it a short distance further, when it came to an abrupt termination on the river where the water was known to be very deep. A hole had been cut in the thick ice and its blood stained edges told the fate of Nathan Reeve. He had been dragged there by some brutal enemy, who had no doubt been a witness to the duel, and put under the ice where the depths of the water would prevent the recovery of the body, for a time at least.

"The great torments!" exclaimed Ben, in bitter asperity, as he brought the butt of his rifle down upon the ice with a force that checked the crystal sheet in a dozen directions; "that's the end of poor Natty Reeve—young, handsome, and brave Natty. And my, my! I can never break the news to that poor little girl whose heart war wrapped in him; no, I can never—"

The rest of the sentence became lost in some deep and painful thought. His eyes sought the ground in silent reflection, and when he raised them again, he caught the glimmer and twinkle of a light on the east shore of the river. He knew from whence it shone—the window of Father St. Ule's cabin—and there was something cheerfully inviting in its soft, twinkling glow that he could not resist, and taking up his rifle he started toward the cabin, resolved to spend the night with the missionary and his pretty, dark-eyed daughter.

He soon reached the front of the cabin. All was silent within. He rapped upon the door—once, twice, thrice—but no voice bade him enter.

"Torment it a-tall, what's it mean?" mused the scout, reflectively, and in no little perturbation of mind. Then he started back, and a thrill of horror shook his frame, as a sudden and terrible thought flashed through his brain.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PICTURE ON THE WALL.

It had suddenly occurred to the mind of Bowie-knife Ben that St. Ule and his daughter had either been murdered by Syl Garnett's Indians and robbers, or had been spirited away. If neither, he felt satisfied there was something wrong, for a light was burning in the cabin and yet no one answered his summons. He saw, however, that the latch-string was out, and this being, upon the border, a silent invitation to a friend or stranger, to enter without ceremony and partake of the hospitalities of the house, he resolved to avail himself of this kindly welcome. In fact, nothing could have induced him to have left the place without knowing the cause of the deep hush within. He softly opened the door and crossed the threshold.

Neither the missionary nor his daughter was in the room, but a bright, cheery fire was burning on the hearth of the capacious fireplace, bearing evidence of having been quite recently replenished. But where were the inmates of the house?—St. Ule and his daughter. The room bore no signs of violence having been done therein. Everything was just as it had been arranged by the deft hand of Sybil. There was the missionary's table covered with papers and books. A large arm-chair made of withes and cushioned with soft furs sat near it. The floor was spotlessly clean; the walls were covered with tapestry and hung with sacred pictures and landscape paintings—all the handiwork of Sybil. Between two doors leading into the separate bedrooms of Sybil and her father, hung a life-size portrait of the Madonna, after the style of Murillo. On the wall opposite this hung a picture of the crucifixion.

There were a few things that gave evidence of the room having been instantly deserted; and yet Ben was satisfied that the inmates had not retired for the night. To be sure of this, however, he advanced and rapped upon the bedroom door of each, but elicited no answer.

"Durned if this don't beat me all holler," mused the hunter, with a puzzled expression upon his face. "They're gone, blast me if they arn't, and it's the first time I ever found myself alone in another man's crib. Torment it!—like as ennyway Sybil's over to Lakeside, and her old dad's out walkin' fur exercise arter workin' all night at makin' his Ingin Bible. Plague take the Ingin Bible; I'd let it go to thunder and shoot the blarsted Ingins, torment 'em. I hearn of a feller named Eliot that spent a thousand years writin' of an Ingin Bible, and arter he put on the doxology touch he found it'd take a million years to larn the varlets to read it, 'ca'se they didn't take to book-larin', like a nigger to a hen-roost. Torment 'em, all they'll ever know's to eat and kill, kill and eat. But I reckon the old general will be in purty soon, so I'll injoy this fire awhile, I will."

He wheeled the old missionary's chair around before the fire, and threw himself into it, laying his rifle across his lap and loosening the weapons in his girdle, for, somehow or other, he cou'd not entirely shake off the vague apprehension of unknown dangers that lingered in his mind.

"Well, this is dog-goned cheerful," he said to himself, as he settled down into a position of ease and comfort, where the ruddy fire sent its warmth through every fiber of his frame. "A hunter's life is a leetle onpleasant this season of the year, 'specially when one's got to be eternally on the tramp—shiftin' here and therro as the wind blows almost, with snow and ice to pester the soul, outen a poor homeless wretch. But joses! when summer comes, give me the green, shady woods and posified prairies—kick me outen a ronstin' hut into the pure air and rectified glories of summer; then, up red-skins and dust yer heels!"

Here the hunter's musings ended, and he began to live over the past. In rapid succession the events of the last few days passed in review before his mind. One by one his adventures were recalled, and, mentally, he fought over many of his sanguinary battles, working himself up at times to such a pitch of excitement that he would involuntarily start from his seat clutching at a weapon in his girdle. At length, however, his thoughts became sluggish and broken. The drowsy influence of the heat of the fire began to tell upon the blood so accustomed to the vigorous cold of the wintry atmosphere. Moreover, Ben was so seldom quiet that through force of habit his mind was the most active when his body was engaged in the most violent physical exercise, which accounted for his quickness to act on the spur of a moment. On the other hand, when his body and tongue both rested, his mind became inactive, in a measure, and sleep was sure to follow.

He was not, however, in a very comfortable position to sleep now, and he would no sooner fall into a doze than he would start up again as if confronted by a foe—gaze wildly around the room, then sit back into his seat to drowse and dream again. But at length he sprung to his feet and found himself face to face with the figure of a woman, who turned her eyes, as he arose from his seat, and met his startled, bewildered gaze.

A second glance at the face told him that he had only been dreaming, for it was the portrait of the Madonna that confronted him. At the same time, however, he was not so deeply confused but that he would have sworn that he actually had seen the eyes of the picture move—turn and gaze upon him in their serene, womanly modesty.

"Well, well, Benjamin Buffet," said the hunter, soliloquizing, "I reckon as what you're gittin' a leetle ole womanish—shaky in the j'ints. Tor-ment! gittin' scart at a picter, ain't you? But no wonder houses make sich skeery cowards outen folks as make a bisness of livin' in 'em. But I sw'ar its eyes *did* move jist like life—there, by heavens! they moved ag'in, and I know I ain't asleep now, am I?"

He had resumed his seat, and in the midst of his musing, he casually glanced at the picture again, and was again assured by the evidence of his own eyes that the eyes of the Madonna actually moved in their sockets.

"Now this beats me, it does, by joses," thought the puzzled borderman. "When picters git to lookin' around as ateral as life—gawkin' a feller square in the eye with an extravagant look, it must be thar's witches in the scrape, it must, by joses—red-skins and vipers!"

The scout sprung to his feet and started back. To his wonder and amazement, he saw the Madonna move upon the wall—*start slowly out from her rustic frame toward him!*

CHAPTER XVII.

WHO FIRED THE SHOT?

As the Madonna started toward Bowie-knife Ben, he sprung to his feet with an expression of superstitious fear overshadowing his face. At the same instant he detected a slight noise outside of the cabin near the door, and believing some unknown danger was approaching from that quarter, he turned and barred the door.

When he turned to the Madonna again, he was not a little surprised to see that the picture stood in its accustomed place looking down upon him in saintly serenity.

"Wal, now, what the dogs and cats does it mean, ennyhow?" the scout asked himself, in no little perplexity of mind. "I surely ar'n't drunk, am I? I ar'n't crazy, be I? I ar'n't—"

At this juncture the door leading into one of the bedrooms was opened, and Father St. Ule made his appearance, dressed in a long, black robe girded about the waist.

"Who is in my house?" he exclaimed, as if suddenly started in affright from his sleep; "who intrudes—why, 'tis you, Ben, my dear old friend!"

"I reckon as what it is, Mr. Missionary," replied Ben, completely nonplused by the rapidly-transpiring events, "but I swear I—excuse me, gineral—I mean I swan—I've been here the last hour makin' noise enuff to wake an Egyptian mummy."

"Indeed, Benjamin?" replied the missionary, with considerable gravity of speech; "well, I have been working hard—very hard—and I sleep like a log when I do take time to sleep. I am alone to-night; Sybil went down to spend the evening with Miss Meredith at Lakeside. I am really glad you called, Benjamin, and beg you will spend the balance of the night here, for I am at last compelled to believe that I have one enemy, at least, in this world of sin, and have reason to believe he's lurking around to put an end to my existence."

"Ther div— I mean the deuce, you say!" exclaimed Ben.

"Yes; between sunset and dusk to-night I was walking leisurely along the river bank in silent meditation, when an unseen foe fired a shot at me, inflicting a painful wound upon my arm."

"Tor-ments, you don't say, do you now, Mister St. Ule?"

"I fain would speak no other words than those of truth, my dear Ben," replied St. Ule, showing the hunter his band-

aged arm, and explaining the nature and extent of the injury.

"Holy joses!" exclaimed the scout; "that beats all nature, I sw'ar it doas!"

Father St. Ule was not an old man, as many called him. He was not possibly over two score years of age, although his hair was gray. His face was smoothly shaven and deeply furrowed with hard, angular lines, which all attributed to hard study. There was nothing striking in the general appearance of the man, but his genial nature, his soft, full, round voice, and Christian hospitality never failed to win the love and respect of all with whom he came in contact. Even his enemies, or those who would naturally be supposed to be his enemies, had been charitable of their mercy toward him, and never until that evening had he received violence from them. Aware from the first, however, of the treacherous nature of the Indians, he had engaged Bowie-knife Ben to keep a casual watch upon their movements, which trust the scout had continued faithfully to discharge, out of his respect for the missionary and his lovely daughter. It is true, several chiefs of hostile tribes were almost constant visitors at the cabin of the white man, but they usually came at his solicitation; and although he had their promise of peace, Ben knew that they were not always inclined to keep their promise, and even if they were, they were not always present to restrain the murderous proclivities of their warriors, and so he kept a close watch upon them when in the vicinity of the missionary's cabin.

"Dog my cats," exclaimed Ben, when St. Ule had given an account of his narrow escape from death, "no Ingin ever fired the shot that hurt you, uncle."

"What makes you think so, Ben?" queried the missionary.

"Why, you've been wounded by a pistol shot, and an Ingin never carries a pistol—hardly ever; if he does at all he's jist as apt to shoot hisself with it as any one else. So you see the chances are nine to one that some villainous white lurked near and done the deed."

"From what else do you deduce your inference, Ben?"

"My which, uncle?"

"What makes you think it is a pistol-shot wound?"

"Why, a bullet 'd cut keener, and not bruised the flesh half so bad. A rifle bullet's like a sharp knife, a pistol-bullet like a dull one. You see we hunters look into these things closely, uncle, and as we learn all by experience we're seldom at fault. My advice is fur you to pull stakes and peg out fur Lakeside."

"I would, Ben, but see here: Omalah, my interpreter, could not be induced to enter a white village, and without his assistance and that of some of the most noted chiefs, I could make few translations. And these chiefs, you know, are hostile to the settlers, and would not dare to venture in side of Lakeside. Even if the whites would condescend to grant them safe conduct to and from the village, it is probable that, in their present bloodthirsty and barbarous condition, they would take a scalp if a good opportunity was offered. But I hope to be instrumental in leading them, some day, out of their present barbarous life, into the pure atmosphere of Christianity."

"Christian fiddle-sticks, uncle; you can't make an angel outen an Ingin no more'n you could make moon-shine outen greased lightnin'."

"And why not? are they not human like you and I?"

"Yes, in form, but not in color. Red is the complexion of original sin, and didn't the Lord make the red-skins?"

"To be sure; God created all things, and the Bible says, 'And God saw everything that he made, and behold it was very good'."

"Then why should we try to make better that what God declared very good? Surely he meant the Ingin along with the rest."

"Then, upon the other hand, why should we slay them?"

"God cast the devil outen heaven, and on them grounds we've a right to rub the red varlets out from among us. But it's wrong, uncle, I sw'ar to gracious it is, fur us earthly critters to try to make better what God said war good. It'd look as though we war grumblin' and findin' fault with our Creator's works. But it's our Christian dooty to fight sin, and as Ingins are the double-rectified essence of sin and cu-sedness, fight 'em, say I—extirminate 'em! Here, uncle, is my Bible," patting his rifle, "and whenever I cite a passage to a red-skin, I gather him to the fold of converts, I do, by Josey."

"You put a wrong construction on man's Christian duty," Benj:min," said the missionary, gravely.

"No, no, uncle, it's jist a dif'rence of opinion. But you go on your way, and I'll go on mine, and I'll bet you my Bible ag'in your'n, that I have the most converts at countin' time."

The missionary laughed in a low, silent manner at the scout's dogmatical perversity of opinion, and at once replied:

"Well, Benjamin, I am very tired and need rest. I presume you will remain with me until morning of course, so I, therefore, will arrange you a couch."

"I'll stay, uncle, but no couch for me. Give me a blanket and this floor, and I wouldn't act'y exchange it fur a bed of roses."

A blanket was given him, when he spread it upon the floor and rolled himself in it; then Father St. Ule bid him good-night, and again sought his own chamber.

Ben soon fell asleep, but it was not that sweet, refreshing slumber which tired nature begets. The face of Nathan Reeve was before him, awake and asleep, and then that picture on the wall seemed to haunt his mind like a phantom. Try as he might to shake off the strange spell, his efforts would prove fruitless. The Madonna with her meek, saintly smile was before him, and turn which way he would, there was the image of the picture.

Thus a couple of hours wore away, and as the old hunter lay with his face toward the partition wall, his eyes half closed, he saw the Holy Mother start slowly out toward him—turn aside when a foot from the wall and swing around as upon hinges.

No doubting the evidence of his senses now; there was some secret connected with the picture. As the picture swung around, he beheld a dark opening beyond, from which the figure of a man suddenly arose, and stepped out into the room.

Ben started with amazement, for he recognized the man. It was Chris Proctor, whom the reader already knows.

The sudden, nervous start of the little hunter's body did not fail to catch the eye of the stealthy intruder, whereupon he sprung quickly back into the opening in the wall, when the Madonna swung noiselessly back into its heavy rustic frame.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BLOOD ON THE SNOW.

BOWIE-KNIFE BEN passed the remainder of the night undisturbed at the cabin of St. Ule, and the following morning took an early departure for the camp of the young sportsmen.

He said nothing of what he had seen during the night, but his mind was not slow in drawing some very startling conclusions. Before departing, he told Father St. Ule of his intended long absence with the amateur hunters, and broke to him the secret of the midnight duel, exacting a promise from the holy father to send the particulars of Nathan's death to his friends at Lakeside.

We will not attempt to describe the thoughts and conjectures that passed through the hunter's mind as he wended his way through the forest toward the camp of Captain Graham and party. The events of the past two days and nights passed and repassed through his mind, and would no doubt have occupied his thoughts all through his journey, had his eye not caught the sight of a huge track in the snow.

A second glance told him it was the track of the giant, Titan. It had been made quite recently, but evidently before the opening of the day, for there were a few crystals of frost in it. The trail tended northward, and although there was nothing now to inspire fear in the heart of the borderman at sight of the giant's track, the discovery he made in connection with it aroused his fears and uneasiness to a high degree. It was the sight of blood—at every step, and even oftener, there was a drop of blood upon the white snow.

What did it mean?—had Titan been wounded? If so, he had been bleeding profusely. As the course of this blood-stained trail was but little out of Ben's course, he set off to follow it. He soon came to where the giant had taken to his elk-sledge, having evidently left the team concealed in the forest while he made an excursion southward on foot.

Ben was sorely tempted to follow up the sledge-track, and would have done so had he not been desirous of making goo' his word to the young sportsmen; so he quit the giant's trail and pursued his way toward the camp in the valley

He at length gained the eminence commanding a view of the vale in which the amateurs were camped. To his surprise he found them closely besieged by the Indians, whose numbers had greatly increased since his departure. A brisk firing was going on on the part of the savages. During the night they had secured a position behind a huge snow-drift within thirty rods of the little defense, and it was at the risk of his life that a man dared to raise his head above the breastworks.

From where he was, Ben could command a view of the interior of the fort, and without much trouble succeeded in making his proximity known to the defenders.

The greatest difficulty was now to overcome—that of gaining the interior of the defense. Could he have reached the valley unseen by the foe, he might have won the shelter before the red-skins could have cut him off. As it was, however, he had but one course to pursue—await the coming of darkness.

This he did, and under cover of the friendly shadows of night he reached the fort, amid the welcome shouts of the amateurs and the redoubtable Larry O'Ray.

"Durn the tormented pesky varlets; they've bothered me a mighty heap, they have, I sw'ar, boys!" Ben exclaimed, as he leaped down into the inclosure that surrounded the beleaguered party.

"Yes, we were afraid you would hardly get in without trouble," replied Sydney Graham. "We saw you on the hill during the day, and were afraid you would abandon the attempt to reach us."

"Torments! Do you underestimate my caliber, captain?" replied the scout.

"Arrah, and that's what mees told 'em, Benny," added Larry O'Ray. "Mees told 'em yee'd come if yees had to carry yer head in yer hands. But, sakes alive, Benny, and didn't yees bring a wee dhrap av something to take?"

"Not a drop, Larry; it's all soured down to Lakeside, it be, by joses," declared Ben. "But times'pear to be kind of lively here."

"Yes, more so than we like; we have nearly exhausted our supply of ammunition and fuel, being compelled to keep both in use constantly. If the Indians don't raise the siege soon, we'll be forced to some dire extremity. It's true, we have an abundance of ammunition cached with our general stock, up near Lake Otter Tail, and there is plenty of fuel within gun-shot of—"

"Yas, bedad, and that's plenty of Ingins, too," interrupted Larry.

"Wal, I'll tell you, boys, I've been in a heap wusser fix than this 'ere. Howsumever, if it's adventer and elephantees yer arter, why, injoy the sport as long as ye kin."

"We'd rather have a little romance to spice such realities as this siege," returned Captain Graham.

"Wal, boys, if the varlets don't let us out atwixt this and to-morry mornin', we'll let ourselves out. You see, that's alers two sides to a question, don't you?"

"There are most generally; yet I can't see where there is but one positive in this case, and the Indians appear to have it on their side."

"In course not," replied Ben, his eyes sparkling with the consciousness of his superiority in the lore of the border; "but if you'd lived all your days on the border, you'd see cl'arly as I do. You may see furder into books, but ye can't read Ingin character, nor nature herself as well as me, I daresay. Book-l'arnin' are all very good fur 'em as can't study from nature, but it ar'n't worth a continental dog-gone on the border. It may give ye a deeper insight to the philosoph of a thing, but not the royal, practikel utility. For instance, yander is a snow-drift ten foot deep, stretchin' from the side of this place cl'ar to the foot of yan bluff, and I reckon as what, captain, you can tell how that drift had its origin, and why it's drifted right thar and no place else."

"Certainly," replied the captain, and he went on and gave a detailed account of the different stages of the temperature, and the manner in which snow was formed, and his opinion as to the drift in the valley.

"Wal," replied Ben, after he had finished, "I reckon that's the philosoph of the thing, but now tell me the real, practikel benefit to be derived from that drift."

"I can see none—for our benefit at least," replied Graham.

"That's it; that's jist the way of book-l'arnin'; good enough in the cities, but it won't gee on the border. No, sir, boys, she won't hitch. Now, God didn't put that drift there fur nothin'. You see if we'd have to fit our way outen

here we'd never see the sun rise again this side of the judgment; and to be rite out with you, we can't stay in here two days longer if we're compelled to. But we ar'n't. God put that snow-drift thar fur our especial benefit. By means of it we can git outen here without a red skin 'nowin' it. "We can tunnel out—tunnel right out under that snow drift, and tunnel out we will. That's our only salvation, it is, by Joses."

CHAPTER XIX.

TWO CAN PLAY AT THAT GAME.

By morning-dawn several rods of tunnel had been completed under the snow-drift leading from the little defense northward to the bluffs. Bowie-knife Ben acted as chief laborer and engineer in the work, though he was relieved at intervals by Larry and the sportsmen. In this manner the work went steadily and rapidly forward, it being far less difficult than the most sanguine had anticipated.

The snow next to the ground was both dry and light, and almost as compressible as feathers, and required no digging—the tunneling all being done by pressing the snow upward to each side. An opening was made large enough for a man to pass through upon his hands and knees. It was decided that most of the camp equipage be abandoned, as it would require too long a time to make a tunnel sufficiently large for its removal.

All day the party worked with a desperate energy. The increasing numbers of the foe, on the hills and in the valley, convinced Bowie-knife Ben that the coming night would not pass without an attack, and he realized that his own party was not in a condition to contend with such an overwhelming number. As the day wore on he expressed grave fears of their inability to accomplish the work before them by nightfall. The distance to tunnel was greater than it had at first appeared, and at sunset nearly a fourth of the distance was yet to work.

Finally when it came the hunter's turn to again enter the tunnel, he said:

"Boys, I'm goin' in thar to work like a'tarnal ole badger, but in the mean time git yerselves ready to rack out on a minit's notice. If the tunnel ar'n't completed at dark, we'll pull out anyhow—go to the eend of the tunnel, wharever that be—root up into the world and run for it like Satan beatin' tan-bark."

"All right, Ben," replied Graham; "we'll follow your injunction."

Ben entered the tunnel, followed by Bob Swifton with a torch, as it was necessary to have light in the passage now in order to facilitate work. They soon reached the end of the tunnel, and with both hands and a rude-improvised wooden spade, the scout began work.

My readers may possibly conclude this incident of my story overdrawn—a too improbable circumstance, but those fully acquainted with this high latitude, and the elements with which our friends were dealing, will readily concede the possibility of tunneling under a snow-bank, and that with comparative ease when the snow is in the condition that Ben and his party found it—light and dry underneath, with a thick, heavy crust on top.

Our friends had taken and kept their course by means of a small pocket-compass belonging to the amateurs, the use of which instrument Ben did not entirely ignore, and which he condescended to consult in order to facilitate work, although he averred repeatedly, that he could keep the course without a foot's deviation in a mile, relying solely upon his hunter's instinct to guide him.

For nearly half an hour Ben had worked away. His companion had kept him posted as to the time, he being provided with a watch. It wanted but a few minutes of the hour that darkness set in, and Ben was expressing his sore regret at his inability to complete the passage, and was about to relinquish his work, when he was suddenly startled by his hand coming in contact with something that seemed to move. The next instant a human hand was thrust through the snow before him—a hand that moved—that was aquiver with life!

Ben started back with amazement written upon every feature of his bearded face. In the glow of the torch he saw that the hand was that of a white man, though brown and skinny.

But what was it doing there? Was it the hand of some creature buried beneath the drift?—or was it the hand of some enemy tunneling toward the little fort, to surprise and murder its defenders?

These were the conjectures that flashed through the quick brain of the hunter, and as if in answer to them, the hand of the unknown was withdrawn—the frail partition of snow between them crumbled down, and the torch flared into the face of a man whose figure sat doubled up in a tunnel beyond! It was an odd-looking face, wearing mingled expressions of fear and comical amazement.

For several moments Ben and the stranger sat glaring at each other in speechless wonder. It was hard telling which was the most surprised and confounded by this sudden meeting under the great snow-drift. Ben's hand mechanically sought a weapon at his girdle, and so did the odd-looking stranger's. There was a slight swelling of each chest, a contraction of the facial muscles, a kindling gleam in each eye—a murderous intent in each heart. But all at once these began to relax—something like a recognition was staying the sudden impulse that had sprung up in their breasts. Ben had seen the man before. At least there was something strangely familiar about his steely eyes, hooked nose and broad mouth that was wreathed in a comical smile, threatening an outburst of laughter. But in the dim, uncertain glow of the torch that wavered and flickered in the current of air that now sucked through the two united tunnels, he could not see his features distinctly.

The deep and painful silence was suddenly broken—relief came—the stranger spoke.

"Gee-rusalem tigers!"

This was enough; the cloud that hung over Ben's memory was swept away, and he recognized the man.

It was the notorious Jeduthan Turk!

CHAPTER XX.

BEN AND TURK HAVE A TALK.

"HOLY Joses! Jeduthan Turk, as I'm a sinner! I sw'ain to nature it be!" exclaimed Bowie-knife Ben, as he gazed upon the odd, comical face of that worthy.

"So I be," replied Turk, in an apparently serious, matter-of-fact tone; "and I swan to nater, Ben Bowie, I be a notion to whale thunder outen you for havin' the contaminated owdacity to run your plaguey tunnel into mine."

"I didn't know your tunnel war in my road," replied Ben.

"To be sure you didn't," replied Turk, with a comical twitch of one corner of his great mouth; "but it does 'pear to me that it's drotted strange that you be diggin' up this way. What does it mean, Bowie?"

"Nothin', only we can't git Ingins enuff to eat."

"P'isen!" exclaimed Turk, in open-mouthed astonishment, and with an apparent shudder.

"I've answered your questions; now what are you doin' here?" asked Ben.

"Me?—oh, I war jist gorin' down to see if you fellers had any thing to drink."

"No, you stole the last we had a few nights ago," was the prompt reply.

"Dear sakes!" exclaimed Turk, with an air of injured innocence; "you're pokin' fun at me now, Ben Bowie; for, for moral veracity and temperate habits, I, Jeduth Turk, have no peer on the border."

"It's no use a-whinin', Turkey; thar's somethin' wrong 'bout you. Guess you and the red-skins ar'n't as hostile to'ards each other as ye mought be; and now say: ar'n't the Ingins in this valley somethin' to do with your eend of this tunnel?"

"Dog my cats if I know, Bowie. They may have, it's true—they may be pluggin' it up to smother me, but lawsl smother nothin' in here; a dead man could breathe in here, I swan he could. But, Bowie, you did do me a fair turn 'other night—turned me over and poured likker down my throat. Sakes! but wa'n't I thirsty though? You did do the fair thing by me, Ben, and as I'm not a man to put confidence in—to die for, you can take me down to camp with you, and if you fellers want to escape, you can use my eend of the tunnel without price and without money. You can do jist as you please with me, you can, jist to treat me well and often. And now, honor bright, Ben, can't you raise me a dram?—a half a gallon anyhow, Bowie?"

"I tell you, man, we arn't a drap of the p'isen," retorted Ben. "But I reckon as what you'd better trot down to camp with us. We'd better look a little out for you."

"I'm yer meat," replied Turk, with an air of total indifference. "You can bind me, gag me, scalp me, eat me—do any thing you want to with me, Bowie, for I know I'm to die a martyr—it runs in the blood; the Turks all die in some good cause."

Without further parleying the three turned and began moving toward the fort, Swifton going before with the torch, and Ben bringing up the rear.

They soon debouched into the little defense, and it was with no little surprise that Graham and his friends gazed upon the stranger, who was the first to speak.

"Howdy, my larks?" was his cool, familiar salutation.

"By the Howly Vargin!" exclaimed O'Ray, "and if it isn't that owld thase av a blatherskoite what shtole our last morsal av rum; and sure and it's a lickin' he'll git unless he thramps up—"

"Hello there, ole Bogtrotter!" exclaimed Turk, confronting Larry, who had assumed a hostile attitude; "ye needn't spruce up here like a mad porkypine 'bout as little a thing as a swaller o' likker. Surely ye didn't begrudge it to a dyin' man, did ye?"

"Och, but yer a murderin' thase av a renegade, and yees ought to be shot, so yees had."

"Think so? Wal, ye can do as ye please 'bout it. It's nothin' to me, Bogtrot; but if any o' you will loan me a pipe, I'll take a little smoke—yes, I don't keer if I do."

While this bandying of words was going on between Turk and Larry, Ben informed Captain Graham how the man came to be there. As to the man's object, however, the scout could form no idea, nor could they gain, by questioning and threatening, any thing that would give the slightest clue to his purposes and movements.

By this time it was dark, and a speedy departure was at once counseled by Ben. Everything but their weapons, a blanket to each man, and a bit of venison, was to be deserted, as it would be impossible to drag their sledges and equipage through the tunnel.

In a few mimutes all were ready for departure, and with torch in hand Ben took the lead, followed by Jeduthan Turk, whom the scout concluded it was best to keep in custody, for a while at least. The young sportsman and O'Ray brought up the rear.

In this manner they moved briskly along the icy tunnel, and in less than twenty minutes all stood in the open air, at the mouth of the tunnel where Jeduthan Turk had begun digging toward the fort—the very spot which Ben had been aiming to reach.

The little hunter being once more in his element—where he had room to act, hastily reconnoitered the surrounding vicinity, and found that no savages were about, and that no one but Turk had been there. This discovery had a tendency to mitigate some of the suspicion the hunters had entertained of Jeduthan.

When the little band began its retreat northward, Turk accompanied them, apparently a willing prisoner, and his unusual loquacity, odd expressions, and mirth-provoking yarns served to detract from the vigilance that the party kept upon him; and, as a result, our friends suddenly discovered that the sly old nomad had given them the slip—Jeduthan Turk had escaped!

CHAPTER XXI.

THE VALLEY OF SHADOWS.

A WEEK has passed since the occurrence of the events narrated in the preceding chapter. Bowie-knife Ben and his party had intrenched themselves some thirty miles north of Fall Lake, where they could almost defy the combined assaults of the whole Sioux tribe. They had taken possession of, and repaired, an old stone building of goodly dimensions that had been erected years previous by a party of hunters and traders belonging to the Hudson Bay Fur Company. From this stronghold the party had a ready and easy access to their supplies *cached* in a cavern in the bluff south of the place.

The party had had little trouble from the Indians since the occupancy of their new quarters, yet it was quite evident that they were being closely watched, and lived in hourly expectation of an attack. What caused them most concern was

the discovery that some one besides their party knew of the whereabouts of their *cached* supplies, and was having access to them quite frequently. Nothing, however, save one of two small casks of brandy had been touched. Over half of the contents had been extracted, and that evidently in small quantities.

Larry O'Ray's tendency toward intemperance led to his being suspected of the theft, but a close watch being kept upon his movements, it was found that he never went near the cavern, and as the thief still continued his visits to the *cache*, the matter became involved in some mystery.

By this time the winter was well advanced. In fact, March had begun with its sunshiny days and chilly, squally nights. The ground was still covered with snow, the lakes and rivers were still frozen over, and while winter virtually lingered in the "lap of spring," all had reason to hope and expect a speedy opening of the warmer season.

The sportsmen had passed about two weeks in their new quarters, when one morning, Bowie-knife Ben and Captain Graham ventured forth on an excursion to Otter Tail Lake, some ten miles to the west. It was at the earnest solicitation of Graham that the little hunter undertook the journey. Why the captain was so anxious to go, Ben could not conceive, but he felt satisfied, by the captain's conversation, that there was something more than the love of adventure drawing the young man there.

"Why've you bin so anxious 'bout goin' up to Otter Tail, cap'n?" asked the hunter, after they were fairly on their way.

"I declare, Ben," replied the captain, a little confused, "I've been under a study whether to tell you or not. I knew I dare not tell it to the boys, for they would never know when to cease running me about it. But the facts are these: shortly after we came into this country, last fall, we had occasion to visit Otter Tail Lake. The boys were all up to exploring the dark, narrow valley on the east side of the lake, which you know opens on the lake, and which can only be entered by water on the west side, unless you run the risk of breaking your neck in descending the perpendicular cliffs that surround it. I remained at the lake to guard our canoe while they were gone, and as I sat alone in the craft, something induced me to paddle under the great rock which projects several feet over the margin of the lake, and which one can almost imagine from its peculiarity of outline, is a huge gray monster crouched there guarding the entrance to the valley—its nose thrust outward over the water as if to scent afar the approach of danger.

"Imagery's strongly developed in yer head, cap'n," replied Ben. "That very rock's called the Wolf, and the valley are called the Valley of Shaders, 'ca'se darkness forever lurks into it, and that's spots whar the sun never shone sence creation in that valley. It's an awful, damp, dismal, forebodin' place, I sw'ar it be."

"Well," continued the captain, "it and the rock are appropriately named then, and I will call the one the Valley of Shadows and the other the Wolf. As I said before, I paddled the canoe under the projecting nose of the grim, stony old guard, and there within its shadows stopped to contemplate my surroundings. I first gazed overhead at the scarped and fluted breast of the old giant, and at the mass of creeping vines that depended from the nether jaw like a mass of heavy, tangled beard. The flutter of a fish, or something dropping in the water, drew my attention downward. The sun, at the time, was in the zenith, and the outer edge of the rock's shadow fell alongside of my canoe. Just beyond this line of shadow, and looking up at me from the clear, limp depths of the lake, I beheld a human face!"

"Tor-ments! You're jokin' like sin. I sw'ar you be, cap'n."

"I am not, Ben. It was actually a human face—the fair face of a woman—a young woman, too—set in a wreath of golden hair. In all my life I had never seen a face so sweet, fair and angelic. I saw it was possessed of life—it moved. A feeling that I cannot describe came over me. My loneliness, the deep solitude of the place, the impression still left on my mind by the first sight of the Wolf through the gloaming—all conspired to fill my brain with vague, intangible shapes."

"Ay, my boy," laughed Ben, "I see into it now. You war asleep and dreamin', and fell in love with the vision of yer dream. Ha! ha! ha!—and here we go, up to Otter Tail to chase a shader. I sw'ar it's an exerusiatin' good 'ne, cap'n, it be."

"I was not asleep, Ben; I was never wider awake than

then; but, hear me through. I rallied from my surprise and mental mistiness, and bent an earnest, searching gaze down upon that sweet, lovely face, and to my surprise I found it was but the reflection of a young girl's face, the original of which was looking down upon me over the edge of the rock above. My heart gave a great leap, but mustering all my self-control, I refrained from looking upward, but feasted my eyes upon the face mirrored in the clear water. And, I must say, Ben, that that face has ever since been reflected from the inmost depths of my heart. To speak more plainly, I fell in love with that vision, and have longed to visit the lake ever since and learn more of that strange beauty. That's what brings me out on this journey. I must find that girl; what is more, I *will* find her if she's in existence."

"Torments, and this is what ye call love," said the scout, musingly. "Wal, wal, boy, you've got a desprite stroke of it, you have, by Josey. In love with a shader, too, now arn't ye? Never see'd any ginewine girl, did ye?"

"No; before I dared to raise my eyes she moved back out of sight, and the boys soon returning, and an Indian canoe appearing on the lake, we left the place in a hurry. Winter then set in shortly afterward, and we have never been back to the lake since; and I assure you, Ben, you are the first man that I have ever hinted this to."

Ben indulged in a low, pleasant laugh of affected indifference, yet it was evident enough that he gave credence to the captain's story, and appeared to be trying to connect it with some event of the past.

They finally arrived at the head of the Valley of Shadows—an oblong depression in the shore of Otter Tail Lake, containing about five acres in area. The place had been appropriately named, for the tall bluffs rising upon three sides, excluded almost the light of day from the recesses. Still, in summer, a species of grass grew down upon the plateau, and stunted pine and hemlock concealed the rugged facade of the bluffs.

Looking westward down the valley the hunters could see the Wolf, crouching amid the glistening snow and outlined against the ice-bound lake beyond, keeping his eternal watch over the bosom of the watery expanse. It required no greater effort of the imagination to define the outlines of a crouching wolf in the great rock than to picture men, animals and giants in the passing clouds overhead.

The rock was about seventy feet in height by two hundred in length. From the nose, or that part projecting over the lake, to the surface of the water it was some forty or fifty feet.

"I declare," said Graham, as he stood gazing down at the great rock, "it looks more than ever like a wolf surrounded by the white snow. Surely this valley must be the consecrated spot of some giants of old; and yonder Wolf the remnants of their statuary—marred, wrinkled and hoary with the wear of time and storm.

"I don't understand the philosophy of the thing, cap'n, but I do know that it looks enough like a wolf to bear the name it does. And, cap'n—" and the hunter's voice fell to a low tone, indicative of some sudden surprise—"thar's sumthin' about that rock I never see'd afore; there be, by Joses. Now look, my lad, and see if you can tell me what it is?"

Captain Graham looked at the rock until a mist blurred his sight, but saw nothing unusual about the spot, and so reported.

"Ah, that comes of the want of eyesight that book philosophy will never give. Now, if you'll look *real* sharp near the shoulders of the Wolf, mebby you can see a thin column of white smoke curling up from it."

"Oh, that, indeed? Well I saw that, but supposed it was mist rising from the lake beyond."

"Nary mist; it's smoke, my boy, and it's curlin' from the back of the rock. Now what does yer book-learnin' tell ye 'bout sich as that?"

"Really, that is a case I have never read of outside of the land of volcanoes."

"Volkanners! Blazes, if a volkanner can't make a bigger stew than that, it hadn't ort to be classed even among catamounts and polecats, it hadn't, by Judas. No, cap'n, that ain't smoke—ginewine smoke from a wood-fire, and it's comin' from inside of that rock. I'll bet any thing thar's a cave in the thing, and in that cave are folks a-livin'—prob'ly some ole hunter and his family; and, come to think, cap'n, your gal may know sumthin' 'bout that 'ere smoke."

Captain Graham's eyes kindled with a sudden joy at this announcement, and his breast swelled with inward hope and the pent-up emotions of love's young dream. He fixed his

eyes upon the rock from which the white, vapory smoke was slowly ascending, and in his heart he wondered if what had so long been a pleasant and yet tantalizing dream would yet resolve itself into reality.

CHAPTER XXII.

A DISCOVERY.

BEN and Captain Graham retired to a point where they could command a view of the Wolf and yet be concealed from the eyes of any one who might be near or upon the rock. If there was an inhabited cavern in the rock, and since they had discovered the smoke, they had not a doubt but there was, they hoped to catch a glimpse of the inhabitants passing in out. But their hopes were in vain; after watching for several hours, the shades of night closed in over the Valley of Shadows and shut the Wolf from view.

"Shall we go back to camp, Ben?" asked Graham, when darkness had obscured their view.

"Never go back, say I, till we know somethin' more 'bout that tormented smoke."

They followed the bluffs around until they reached the lake; then, under cover of the bank, they stole along upon the ice toward the Wolf. When nearly under it, they went ashore and concealed themselves in a clump of bushes, and watched and listened for some clue to the mystery of the Valley of Shadows.

The moon had not risen yet, but the stars were shining brightly. The summit of the Wolf was sharply outlined against the sky, and no object could have appeared upon it unseen.

For several hours the hunters kept their watch, conversing in low tones. As the night advanced the air began to grow quite cold, to the discomfort of the watchers. They were on the point of relinquishing their vigil, when, all of a sudden, a round, dark object—moving upon the summit of the Wolf—arrested their attention. It was rising gradually, and when a few inches above the summit of the rock, our friends saw it was the head of a man. Slowly it rose higher and higher—followed by the shoulders, body and legs, until the full outlines of a person of small stature were plainly visible.

As the man appeared in sight, he paused and appeared to be listening, and on being assured of the absence of danger by the profound silence that reigned, he moved toward the western extremity of the rock and immediately sunk from view.

The scouts would have crept around and watched him had not two other figures appeared upon the summit of the rock the moment the first disappeared. Both were females clad in long, black cloaks thrown hood-like over their heads.

Young Graham's heart throbbed excitedly, and he strained his eyes through the starlight in vain endeavors to see the faces concealed beneath the hoods.

The figures moved slowly and saunteringly along the top of the rock, apparently engaged in conversation. One of them was short and stoutly built, and moved with a slight, waddling gait. The other was tall, slender and easy of motion, appearing to float along by the side of her companion.

With bated breath the hunters watched them several moments. Ben was the first to speak.

"That tallest one with the movement of a floatin' swan must be yer gal, cap'n."

"I daresay it is she whose face I saw reflected in the lake," replied Graham, never moving his eyes from the figures.

"Wal, I'll be tormented to death if this arn't a slap-up mystery."

"If I could only get an opportunity to speak to them, I—"

"Why not make yerself known," interrupted Ben. "Jist whistle to her."

"I wouldn't be so rude for anything, Ben. She might hate me for it. Women are sensitive creatures, and like to be approached carefully. I will trust to Providence to bring us together."

"Torments! Love is a curious disease, I swow; but, harkee, lad, they're singin'—oh, birds of Paradise!"

Low and soft as the dulcet strains of a harp, the voice one of the females floated out upon the vibrant, crispy

as she trilled forth some sweet, familiar notes that recalled to young Graham's half-bewildered mind some forgotten love of the past. He bent his ear and listened to catch the words, and his breast rose and fell in accord with the measure of the enchanting melody.

At length the singer ceases—her voice dies away in sweet, tremulous strains upon the night.

The spiteful crack of a rifle was the horrible *encore* that greeted the ears of our friends, and the robed singer was seen to spring forward and sink at the feet of her companion—a shriek of agony pealing from the lips which, but a moment before, moved and quivered with the sweet strains of music upon them.

"Oh, God! some fiend has—"

A rustle not far away cut short Graham's words. The next instant a dusky figure came bounding through the undergrowth with a smoking rifle in his hand.

Quick as the lightning's flash Bowie-knife Ben's arm swept the air, and the red assassin fell to earth, the fall driving a bowie-knife still deeper into his brain.

"Oh, Howly Mother!" came a wail from the top of the rock, and our friends saw the short, stout woman bending over the form of her companion—swaying to and fro like a reed in the wind, and wringing her hands in bitter sorrow and distress.

Captain Graham was on the point of rushing out from his concealment and making his presence known; but Ben, divining his thought and intention, restrained him. The next moment the figure of another man appeared on the rock, and lifting the form of the fallen woman in his arms, disappeared with his burden from view—sunk down into the rock, followed by the short woman.

"Oh, heavens, Ben!" cried Graham, "thus ends my dream. That fiend has slain her!"

"How do you know it's her? How do you know she's killed, if it is her? How do you know but the chunky woman's your gal?"

"The voice of the singer corresponded with the beauty of her whose face I saw mirrored in the lake," replied Graham.

"Durn my cats if tbar isn't somethin' tormented queer 'bout all this," replied Ben, betraying some perplexity of mind; "I do know, though, that that chunky woman is an Irishman, and Lord only knows who the other gal and the man are. Some exiles, I'll wager big. I know one thing, howsumever; that Inglin will never kill another woman, the cowardly dog."

"Ben, I must try and find out whether the woman was killed or not. Let us look around the rock, and maybe we will find some entrance to the cavern in which they are concealed."

Ben acquiesced in this, and the two began a careful reconnaissance around the rock. An hour and more was spent thus, without finding the slightest clue to the mysteries connected with the Wolf; so the hunters finally relinquished their search, and started back to camp, with the avowed intention of returning to Otter Tail Lake on the morrow.

While proceeding briskly along through the forest, they were suddenly brought to a halt by the sound of a human voice. They stopped and listened. They recognized the voice at once as that of Jeduthan Turk, speaking in drunken, maudlin tones. He appeared to be addressing some one, and at times his voice was couched in fierce, imperative oaths, and then again in coaxing, compromising appeals.

"What does it mean, Ben?" asked Graham.

"Let's see, though I warrant it's some tormented foolishness of that ole skinflint, Turk."

They crept softly toward the man and soon came in full view of him. The moon was up, and its beams struggling through the tree-tops fell full upon a ludicrous spectacle.

Jeduthan Turk had spread his blanket upon the snow and was lying upon it, with his feet elevated upon a fallen log toward the moon. By his side sat a large flask, from which he occasionally took a draught.

"Oh, thunderation, Nora," our friends heard him say, "put on so' more wood, for I'm freezin'. Durn the fire; that's no (hic) strength in't—not a devilish bit (hic). Fire 'p, Nora, or, please Hea—(hic)—ven, you'll 'ave a corpse on (hic) your hands."

It was evident from this that the man, in a beastly state of intoxication, was addressing some imaginary person, and at the same time was laboring under the delusion that the moon was a huge bed of glowing coals before which he lay stretched with his feet elevated to warm them. As no heat

was given forth he was endeavoring to induce Nora, whoever Nora was, to replenish the cheerless, dying fire.

"By Gee-rusalem!" he suddenly broke forth, as if fired with sudden anger, "if you (hic) don't put on some wood, Nora Mackarthy (hic), I'll smash every bone in your body (hic), I will, by Judas! Don't I (hic) tell you, wench, I'm freezin'? Do you want a (hic) corpse to bother with, ye boggy-tongued hussey? For the Lor' sake, Nora, do fire up (hic), and I'll willin'ly die for you, I will, by (hic) hokey! Come, now, that's a good old gal (hic), now I sw'ar 't is (hic). Pile her on, Nora dear, and I'll give you a big swig 'f whisky from (hic) the hunters' cave, I will, by (hic)!"

"Thar!" exclaimed Ben, "that tells who's a-stealin' of yer medicine, cap'n."

"The old thieving scoundrel, he ought to be shot!" replied Graham, indignantly.

"No, no, cap'n; thar's a secret 'bout that ole catawampus that's wuth findin' out. You remember the man that fust come out on the Wolf and disappeared? Well, who knows but that Jeduthan Turk is that identical man? The ole rascal's been stealin' our medicine, but, lookey here: if he war the friend of the Ingins, and our enemy, he wouldn't lose any time in tellin' the red varlets 'bout your stores and cleanin' out the cache; no, sir, cap'n, he wouldn't, and mind I tell ye—"

"Suppose we trot him into camp and keep him there till he sobers off? Then, perhaps, we can get some facts out of him," interrupted Graham, growing impatient.

"He mout take it into his ole noggin that his affairs are none of our bis'ness. But jist hear him rant. He thinks, the blarsted ole gourd-head, that the moon's a fire. Mebby he'll blab the very thing we want to know, if we keep still long enuff."

They remained quiet and listened to the drunken man's ravings and imprecations that forced a smile to the lips of the hunters.

The name Nora, young Graham, in reverting in mind to the scene upon the Wolf, incidentally connected with the short, stout woman, whose wail of sorrow had smote his ears when her companion fell by the bullet of the treacherous, lurking red-skin.

And, somehow or other, Ben was persuaded that Turk was the man first seen on the rock who was just leaving on one of his nocturnal raids upon the supplies of the adventurers.

The hunters were upon the point of advancing to where the drunken man lay, when the light craunching of the snow-crust behind them gave warning of approaching danger.

"Ingins, cap'n, by the billions," whispered Ben, as his cat-like eye caught sight of a number of shadowy forms stealing through the undergrowth. "Let's make ourselves scarce."

"But Turk—what about—"

"Come, lad—curse Turk—don't you see?—it's all a trap, boy—him and the Ingins understand each other; come, peg it down like Satan beatin' tan-bark, cap'n; the devils are arter us like sleuth-hounds!"

CHAPTER XXIII

A FEARFUL RIDE

FOR over a week following the events of the preceding chapter, the weather had continued unusually open and warm. The snow had begun to melt, and the smaller streams had thrown off the shackles of winter, and began their murmuring song. The hoarse "houk" of the wild-goose, and the harsh "caw" of the crow, heralded the coming of spring.

Bowie-knife Ben and his party kept close in camp during this "soft weather," though to Captain Graham each day was as a month, so eager was he to get back to the Valley of Shadows, and make further inquiries into the mysteries of the grim old sphinx that guarded the valley, and ascertain, if possible, whether or not the bullet of the red assassin had proved fatal to her whose face was ever before him.

At length, however, a day suitable for a journey to the lake dawned, and the captain, accompanied by Larry O'Ray, went up. The weather was still warm when they left, but Ben, who rather opposed their going, said, on the eve of their departure:

"You may regret it, cap'n. If my signs are right this time, and they've never failed me heretofore, these fine days are weather-breeders, and about to-night we'll have a reg'lar ole nor'-western that'll blow the breeches off you. Thar'll likely be snow, too, fur the month of March are full of squalls that beat Janaway ones while they last."

Despite Ben's prognostication of the weather, Graham and Larry went up to the lake. It was noon when they reached the head of the Valley of Shadows. They scanned the grim old Wolf and its silent surroundings, but not a sign of life was visible. Far beyond, they could see that the center of the lake was open, and that across its bosom great floes of ice were being driven by the wind.

Around the shores the ice still maintained its position, extending over fifty rods out from the bank. This rim, however, had become cracked and rotten, and was liable to be broken up at any moment by the combined action of the surging waters beneath, and the warm wind and sun above.

It was at once arranged that Larry should pass around the valley on the north and Graham on the south, the two to meet at the point where O'Ray would touch the lake.

Separating, each one set out upon his course, keeping within the dense undergrowth, and a sharp look-out for any sign that would be evidence of the Wolf not having been deserted entirely.

When he found himself alone, Graham at once gave way to mental reflections that were both pleasing and painful, judging by the expressions of his face. He was a man of some four and twenty years, and while he lacked that effeminate beauty of an Adonis, of which the sentimental novelists prate, he excelled in physical manhood and intellectual culture most men of his own age.

Free of heart he had plunged into the wild excitements of the West to wear off, in the open air and by lively exercise, the growing *ennui* that he had been contracting by the sedentary requirements of his profession. Ever since his *debut* into society had he withstood the charms of the fair sex of his native city, notwithstanding his fondness for the society of the ladies; and when he left home, he was under no pledge of eternal fidelity to any fair one. His comrades believed his heart invulnerable to woman's charms, and often chided him on his want of true appreciation of the opposite sex. But, little did these comrades dream of the true state of their leader's heart during the past winter. They would never have done with teasing him had he told them openly that he was in love with a woman whom he had never seen, except by the reflection of her face in the clear, limpid waters of the Otter Tail Lake.

The young man moved on briskly, observing many of the precautions that he had been taught by Bowie-knife Ben. An hour's walking brought him to the lake, but he had made no discoveries whatever. The wind, which had been gradually changing from the south all day, was now blowing a stiff gale from the east, and far out in the middle of the lake, where the ice had broken up, he could hear the sullen swash of the waves as they beat upon the ice that still fringed the shores.

In order to reach O'Ray, Graham would be compelled to pass around in front of the Wolf upon the ice; and it was with no little trepidation of mind that he descended to the lake and began picking his footsteps carefully across the rotten ice. He had made half the distance, and was just in front of the Wolf, when a prolonged, retreating roar, like that of a cannon, suddenly greeted his ears, and he felt the ice beneath his feet tremble, as if under the jar of an earthquake.

He paused and gazed around him, when several more reports, but not so loud as the first, forced a terrible reality upon him. The ice upon which he stood had broken loose from the shore for fully half a mile to the right and left, and was drifting out into the open lake, in the mean time breaking up into small floes.

Seeing the awful danger that threatened him, Graham rushed toward the shore, but before he could take a dozen steps, there was a boom and a surge, and the ice upon which he was adrift broke into pieces. He was left upon the inward floe, which although half an acre in area, was the smaller of the two, and drifted rapidly to sea, cutting off all hopes of escape.

This was a very unpleasant situation for the young man, and not a little perilous. The ice, being soft and brittle, and in such an immense body, was not likely to withstand the straining of the waves, and at any moment it was liable to be broken up, when Graham must be hurled into the seething depths below.

To call attention, and if possible, immediate assistance, were his first thoughts. He shouted at the top of his lungs, but elicited no response. He fired his rifle, but the wind was against him. Being a hundred yards from the shore, now, it was not likely human ears could hear his signals of distress. At least, such were his conclusions; but why did he not cast his eyes toward the summit of the Wolf? A tiny flag fluttering there might have given him some hope. But in his peril he thought only of Larry O'Ray—his only hopes were in being seen by him. But even these hopes afforded him little relief, for he was satisfied that there was not a canoe upon the lake; and even if there were, it could never be managed upon the tossing waters amid the crashing, grinding floes, many of which were acres in size. In fact, the only chance of escape that he could see lay in his being drifted across the lake, and even this would be attended with many dangers. An enemy might be there to receive him, or the returning current prevent the near approach of the floe to the shore. Moreover, the day was wearing rapidly away, and the prophecy of Bowie-knife Ben was coming true. A storm was gathering in the clouds above, and it threatened to be one of those fearful "snow-squalls" peculiar to March in this latitude—more dangerous and dreaded by the hunter and trapper than a storm in the dead of winter.

The wind drove the floe rapidly out, further and further into the lake. Graham was compelled to take a position on the lee side of the ice to escape being washed overboard by the waves that were dashed up half across the ice-floe.

To add discomfort to his perilous situation, the wind became damp and chilly. He was not clad sufficiently to prevent suffering, and the sudden change from warm to cold was all the more severely felt.

The wind gradually shifted into the north-east, and then the storm that had so long been gathering broke forth. The air became filled with whirling, flying snow flakes, shutting off all view of the surrounding lake, and adding new horrors to the situation.

The sun went down soon after the opening of the storm; then followed a darkness black as Erebus.

Half an hour later, the floe upon which Graham was adrift received a terrible shock, its leeward side pitching high into the air and there remaining motionless. The young man was thrown violently down by the sudden shock, and it was only with quite an effort that he was enabled to regain his feet. When he did, it was to find that one side was down and the other up. In a moment the truth of the situation flashed across his mind. The floe had grounded upon a sand-bar in the middle of the lake, still adding new dangers and terrors to his already trying ordeal. He was compelled to use his rifle as a brace to keep his feet at all; and in a few minutes more another floe was driven up against his own,apping several yards over it, and sinking the lower side still deeper in the water.

Another and still another lodged and lapped around and upon his ice-float, and soon a mighty pack was wedged around him, and all chances of going adrift again cut off, while the wind remained in its present quarter.

Despair at last took possession of the young man's breast. He felt that Ben's words had been, alas! too prophetic. He was satisfied that he could never escape the perils and rigors of the night. Already his limbs were growing numb with cold, and it required every effort of his failing strength to battle against the still worse and more subtle enemy—Sleep, the companion of Cold. He could not see his hand before him, the air was so densely filled with the flying snow, and the darkness so intense. The wind moaned and shrieked in demoniac glee around him. The waves dashing among the jumbled ice-pack, and the breaking, lapping floes crushed, wrenched and ground each other—all filling the very soul of the young man with terror.

He arose to his feet and attempted to keep warm by moving around. He thrashed his arms about his body and stamped his feet vigorously. But his efforts were all in vain. Dangers with the horrors of the Cimmerian gloom multiplied around him. His blood ran more sluggishly, and gradually he lost the powers of will; a strange, drowsy, dreamy sensation, filled with startling, pleasurable emotions, was stealing over his senses—a sensation that he could not conquer.

He rallied his failing strength into one effort and lifted his voice to Heaven in prayer. But the mad wind choked back all utterance as it rushed across the lake, driving the cutting sleet into his face and chanting a requiem of horrible mockery. The great ice-pack creaked and groaned as it rose and fell with the surge of the angry waters.

Ice, wind and waves seemed endowed with a life of evil, and battling with each other like demons for the life of the almost unconscious man.

An infinitude of forms were now passing before his mind; his brain was yielding to the double influence of sleep and cold; he reeled like a drunken man; he grasped at imaginary forms like one delirious; he staggered and fell. No groan escaped his lips; no struggle convulsed his form. He lay motionless as death, while the icy fingers of the north wind toyed with his damp locks and wove a mantle of white around his now unconscious form!

CHAPTER XXIV.

O'RAY'S ADVENTURES.

"We will now go back and look after Larry O'Ray, whom we left to pursue his way around the north side of the Valley of Shadows. After leaving Captain Graham he moved on quite briskly with his usual recklessness—notwithstanding his superiority as a hunter and scout. He soon reached the lake, and as Graham had not yet made his appearance at their point of meeting, he seated himself to await his coming.

The sound of voices, a minute later, greeted his ears, and peering through a thicket of tangled undergrowth that shut out a view of the valley, he saw two female forms approaching, apparently unconscious of his presence.

One of them was tall and graceful, with a beautiful form and face; the other short and stoutly built, with a full, red face which instinctively told Larry she was a woman of his own nationality. The former could not have been over eighteen years of age, the latter two-and-twenty. In the eyes of Larry, the stout woman was far handsomer than the frail, fairy-like creature that walked by her side, and he feasted his eyes upon her full, healthy, pleasant features with a smile of delight playing upon his own bearded face. He was rendered speechless by the sight, but when the girls finally stopped and seated themselves upon a rock, his first impulse was to rush from his concealment and let his presence be known, but summoning a little discretion, he mastered his emotions and remained quiet—bent his ear and listened.

"And ar'n't yees toired, me darlint?" he heard the short, stout woman ask as they seated themselves.

"A little, Nora," replied the maiden; "it is hard work climbing that hill."

"Indade it am, choild; and wees had betther go no furder for fear the beastly Ingins moight be around. It war moighty near, yees know, that an ugly red rhascal come killing yees a few noights ago."

"Yes, Nora; although I was only stunned by the bullet, it came near ending my life."

"Wirrah! and the red varlet 'll niver do the loikes ag'in, me swate Zora, for it war him that wees found dead next mornin' roight where the shot war foired from."

"Nora, do you think that young stranger, called Graham, slew that Indian or knew aught of its being done?"

"Bless yer swate sowl, Zora, ye'd moight as well ask a woman her age. How does I know? Wer'n't there thracks there, though, that looked loike a gentleman's boot-phrints? But for the sowl of mees I couldn't say it war *him*, darlint. But mees wouldn't take on about him, choild, for loike as anyway he's some bad young man that 'd break yer young heart to smithereens."

"Oh, Nora, I can never think so. But, what could he, a gentleman of birth and education, ever care for the daughter of an exile—a fugitive from the laws of his native land? Oh, dear! Nora, I sometimes wish I was dead!"

"Och, now, me darlint! don't say sich wicked things, or yees 'll break the heart av Nora Mackarthy, so yees will—oh!"

A sullen noise like the distant boom of a cannon startled them, forcing the exclamation from Nora's lips. It was several minutes before they could trace the cause to its proper source. The rim of ice along the shore of the lake had broken loose and was drifting out into the lake. Far beyond the Wolf they beheld the figure of a man adrift upon a floe of ice. It was Sydney Graham, whom the eyes of the beautiful girl called Zora, recognized at the first glance.

Like a startled fawn the maiden sprung from the rock—ran down the almost precipitous declivity, and sped across

the valley toward the Wolf, closely followed by Nora, her maid.

Larry was ignorant of the cause of their sudden departure, and he began creeping through the thicket to obtain a better command of the valley and lake. A rustling in the bushes arrested his attention. He stopped and glanced quickly around him. His eyes met a pair of scintillating orbs glowering upon him from a dusky, painted face. Both he and the savage seemed transfixed by the sight of each other. Like jungle-tigers they stood glaring at each other, the hot breath coming from each half-open mouth. A diabolical gleam kindled rapidly in the warrior's eyes, but it was met by the cool, deadly flash of the Hibernian's steel-gray orbs. The face of the one twitched and quivered with the fierce animal passion struggling in his breast to escape, while a faint smile, that was even terrible in its expression, wreathed the face of the other. But this lasted only for a moment. Like the panther when he springs from his covert upon the unsuspecting quarry, each shot through the air and grappled hand-to hand.

A desperate struggle ensued, in which every physical energy, fired by a deadly animosity, was exerted. Neither one had drawn a weapon, and the contest was to be decided in favor of the one possessing the greatest skill and endurance. At times they were down, rolling here and there like two animals in each other's deadly grasp; now upon foot, reeling and spinning to and fro in a waltz of death. At times they would cease to struggle, and remain as motionless as death, though their bleeding, lacerated faces and shoulders quivered with the pent-up convulsions of their maddened brains.

They fought on for several minutes. Neither had gained the slightest advantage, for they were well matched. But, suddenly, Larry felt the Indian's grip loosen upon him; something warm fell upon his hands. He raised his eyes, and to his wonder saw it was blood spurting in crimson jets from a bullet-hole in the savage's forehead.

With a convulsive stiffening of the limbs, the savage lost his balance and fell to the earth.

Larry drew a breath of relief as he gazed around him for the friend that had fired the deadly shot. He felt sure that Graham had done it, but he was unable to tell, so intent had he been in his struggle with his foe, from what direction the shot had come.

He waited several minutes, but to his surprise his friend did not come. He shouted his name aloud, but there was no response. It now occurred to him that the shot might have been intended for himself, by a friend of the savage, who, by a sudden movement of the head, had received the fatal ball. In fact, as no one appeared, this seemed altogether probable, and for fear of a repetition of the shot, he took his rifle and that of the savage, and hurried away toward the head of the Valley of Shadows. Arrived there, he halted only for a moment. He was satisfied that Graham was in trouble, or else the sudden breaking up of the ice had prevented his passage around to the designated point of meeting. To make certain his suspicions were correct, he tracked the captain around to the lake, but here his trail disappeared.

Larry at once began retracing his footsteps toward camp, hoping to find that the captain, unable to pass around the lake, had returned there.

It was dark when he came within hearing of their fortified camp. The sharp report of fire-arms greeted his ears as he neared the place, and in an instant a terrible fact rushed across his mind: the post had been attacked by the Indians and a desperate conflict was going on. The woods and valley surrounding the building seemed literally swarming with the foe, cutting off his chances of joining his besieged friends. He resolved, however, to make an effort to that effect, and continued his approach.

As before stated, the building occupied by the hunters was a stone structure that had been erected by a party of traders and trappers. It was located at the edge of a narrow wooded valley, and built back against an abrupt acclivity. It was provided with every available means of defense, and with sufficient accommodations for a dozen men. A little stream of water running through the valley passed under one corner of the building. Since the trappers had deserted the building, a fringe of willows had grown up along its banks, extending up to the very walls of the post; and it was under cover of this shrubbery that O'Ray began his dangerous approach toward the house.

He crept forward on his hands and knees, and to his joy

soon found himself near the cabin. The most dangerous part was yet to come. There was an opening between him and the door which, he had not a doubt, a dozen pairs of savage eyes were watching. Before making a rush for it, however, he stopped and listened. All was still outside as it was within. He could see lights within the house twinkling through the open loop-holes, and now and then he could see dark figures passing to and fro between these lights. Not a savage was to be seen, but, suddenly, a fierce yell rent the air, and then from the woods to the south rushed two score of frantic warriors.

Larry crouched down in the bushes. He saw a dozen tongues of fire shoot suddenly from the walls of the post, and the clash of as many reports succeed.

The savages were repulsed; they turned and sought the cover of the woods, though no cry or groan told whether he had been hit or not.

Now was Larry's time, and rising to his feet, he rushed across the opening to the door, upon which he gave two or three raps.

He saw the lights within were immediately extinguished; he heard the rush of feet upon the floor. A moment passed, then he heard the door being unfastened, and finally swing open.

Quick as a flash he sprung into the dark room, and the door was slammed shut and fastened.

"Arrah, now, boys!" he exclaimed, "and it's a lively toime yees are having."

A groan and apparent struggling in the room was the only response that greeted his ears.

A chill crept over him.

"Howly Mother, and who's hurt?"

As if in answer to his question, a light flooded the room, and the scene that met his eyes was sufficiently terrifying to have paralyzed a braver, stouter heart than his.

CHAPTER XXV.

STORM-LOST.

STILL hung the darkness of night over the land, still raged the storm across the fretful, throbbing bosom of Otter Tail Lake. All inanimate nature seemed to have acquired a life—a soul full of the elements of destruction, that were struggling with each other for the mastery of the lake, and the unconscious form of Sydney Graham.

But, despite the struggling elements, a boat was abroad upon the lake, rocking to and fro—rising and falling and dancing upon the waves as though it were but an egg shell. A dim, lurid light marked its position upon the water. It stood well in toward the eastern extremity of the surging caldron, but appeared to be heading westward and quartering with the storm.

What did it mean? Who on earth was so foolhardy as to venture out in the night and storm upon the lake at such a time? Surely the love of existence was not strong in them—was only a secondary object—to what?

There were two occupants in the boat—one a man, and the other—a woman! The former was clad in a great fur coat, fur gloves, and fur cap. A woolen comforter was tied over his head and ears. Only a portion of his bearded face was exposed to the storm. The woman was wrapped in a waterproof cloak and hood, and her face protected from the cutting sleet by a heavy vail securely fastened at its corners. In one of her gloved hands she held a lantern whose light could be seen afar through the storm, and in the other, a small pocket-compass whose trembling needle pointed out their course across the stormy waters.

The man handled the paddle with the skill of one whose life had been spent upon the water. Both were covered with snow and spray, and all the surrounding horrors that they could not hear were revealed by the uncertain glow of their lantern. Great floes of ice dashed around them, and it was only by the providence of Heaven that they were not crushed to death. They could see the great waves rolling above and beneath them, lashed to fury and frothing under the terrible blows of the storm-whip. Before them, and beyond the radius of their feeble light, was a wall of impenetrable gloom which no doubt concealed terrors from which the stoutest heart might shrink.

But not so with these two fearless navigators of the wild, stormy lake. They urge on their little boat as if their lives

depended upon that voyage. But why? Was it to escape some dangers of the shore that they had ventured forth upon the lake? If so, whither were they going?—wherein did they expect to find a refuge of safety? Surely not within their boat upon the troubled bosom of the lake.

Suddenly the woman spoke as she consulted the compass in her hand.

"Father, our course is a few degrees too much to the southward."

It was a girlish voice that spoke, but it was firm and unmoved and even musical in its tone.

The man plied the paddle and brought the canoe to the right course.

"The storm is quartering against us," he replied, in a tone of great strength, "but if we ever escape from this lake alive, I will begin to think God is exceedingly good to us, Zora. Many stormy nights have we spent upon Otter Tail Lake, but never on such a mission as this, which, after all, I am afraid will be for naught."

"Why so, father?" asked Zora, and her voice betrayed a faltering spirit.

"I am afraid the young stranger has perished ere this."

A sigh that deepened almost into a sob escaped the maiden's lips.

"If the ice-raft upon which you say he went adrift, grounded upon the sand-bars, there will be little hope of saving him. He'll be washed into the lake, or crushed by the larger floes."

"Zora, my child," her father continued, after a moment's pause, "I could not see a human being perish; it was my generosity of heart toward the suffering, toiling slaves of the South that sent me an exile to the Valley of Shadows; and yet, perhaps, I may regret, if I should save that man's life, that I ever did so. He has won your heart and happiness."

"It is no fault of his, father; he never spoke to me, and I know not whether he is aware of my existence," replied Zora.

"Yes," began the father, but a great wave dashed in fury against their little boat, covering them with spray.

When the canoe had ceased its violent tossing, Zora said, consulting her compass:

"We're going almost south, father."

The man at once set his course by the maiden's directions, and they worried on and on across the billowy expanse.

Suddenly the prow of the craft struck an obstruction in the water. The rays of the lantern showed them what it was—an ice-floe whose dimensions extended far beyond their range of light. They waited for the huge mass to pass on by them, but it moved not.

"It must be grounded upon the bars, father," said Zora, straining her eyes into the distant gloom.

"Yes, it must be; I was thinking we were not far off the bars. This floe is fast; that's certain, and it would be well for search to begin. Peradventure the young man may be alive, and able to make known his position if I should call to him and be heard."

So saying, the man shouted at the top of his lungs a number of times, but only the moan of the storm answered him.

"He is not on this floe, else he is dead."

Zora moaned in spirit, and a convulsive sob came up from her heart.

"We may be wrong, Zora, in regard to this floe being grounded upon the bars, and to be certain, I will land upon it and explore its length and breadth. We had both better land, for there is danger of being crushed here."

"Anything, father, to hasten our mission of mercy," said Zora.

The man and his daughter had no difficulty in getting from the canoe onto the ice. The canoe was then drawn from the water to prevent its being crushed or going adrift. A dark lantern already lit, was then taken up by the old man, and opening the bull's eye he set out to explore the huge ice-raft. Zora was left at the canoe with instructions to keep her lantern oscillating as a guiding signal for her father.

With the strong rays of his lantern thrown before him, the kind hearted old exile of the Valley of Shadows moved across the floe with cautious footsteps. It was with great difficulty that he could advance with the storm beating against him and in his face. He soon reached the western extremity of the floe, however, and found that it was lapping another whose dimensions were lost in the darkness beyond.

While he stood pondering as to the course he should next pursue, he was sure he caught a sound like feet hurrying past him. He shot the rays of his lantern around him, but saw nothing save the driving sleet.

He turned and continued his search, following on around the edge of the floe. He knew by the turns he made in his course that the raft was not a large one; but traveled on and on for several minutes expecting to reach his daughter. But failing in this, he stopped, closed his lantern and looked for her signal-light. But, nowhere was it to be seen. He swept the surrounding gloom, but no light pierced its murky blackness.

What did it mean? Why had Zora failed to keep the signal in sight? These were questions the father asked himself. Then his heart almost ceased to beat as a fearful thought rushed across his brain.

"My God!" he exclaimed, "have I lost my child?—has the storm swept her into the lake? Oh, heavens, this agony—torture—my child, my Zora lost!"

The bearded, rime-covered face of the old exile assumed an expression of the wildest despair; he opened his lantern and rushed forward over the floe, shouting aloud in tones that rivaled the bitterness of the storm's shriek, the name of his lost child.

"Zora! Zora! my darling child, where, oh, where in God's name are you?"

Alas, where indeed! Only the storm-winds answered him in moans of terrible mockery.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ZORA'S PERIL.

ZORA's sudden disappearance was clouded in a fearful mystery to her father. He searched the floe over and over, but could find no trace of her, or the canoe. In the most terrible agony of heart and mind he paced to and fro cursing the fates that had sent him out upon the lake in the face of such a fearful storm with his child. But then he reflected over the events of the day, and called to mind the fact that it was at Zora's own most urgent request—yea, appeals, that he had been induced to venture forth. This thought gave him a spark of relief, and as his emotions grew calmer, and he began to think, it suddenly occurred to him that those footsteps, that he had imagined he heard pass him on the ice, were in some manner connected with Zora's mysterious disappearance.

In this the old exile was correct. Scarcely three minutes had elapsed after he left her, ere the maiden felt a pair of strong arms thrown around her and pinioning her own arms helplessly at her side. She screamed for help, but her mouth was so closely muffled by her vail and wrappings that her voice could not have been heard ten paces away.

The lantern was rudely snatched from her hand by a second person, who at once proceeded to launch the canoe. This done, Zora's captor lifted her in his arms, and with the assistance of his companion, stepped into the boat.

The two unknown villains then covered the lantern with a blanket, and while one guarded Zora, the other took up the paddle and pushed off from the floe, out into the seething, boiling waters of the tempest-tossed lake.

Zora was now allowed the privilege of her voice.

"Villains," she exclaimed, in a tone full of indignation and asperity. "I protest against this brutal power of yours."

"Of course—it's natural enough that you should," replied her captor, in an affected, matter-of-fact way; "but you are certainly not aware of your own danger, my fair lady, else you would not be out here on this lake at such a time."

"Sir, I am not alone; my father came with me and is on the floe searching for—"

"A young man named Graham," interrupted the man; "it was very unfortunate for the boy to go adrift on that cake of ice. I'm afraid the chap is past saving, Miss Beauty, for he was quite insensible when we found him on a neighboring floe. We warmed his jacket a little for him, poured some brandy down his throat, wrapped him up in a blanket, and left him, as we had no means of assisting him further. He may escape, and he may not."

Notwithstanding this avowed kindness to a suffering human being, Zora was satisfied from the tone and looks of the man that he was a villain.

Both were well dressed against the rigorous cold of the night, and took no pains to keep their faces concealed. The captive saw that her guard was a middle-aged man, though his hair and whiskers were gray. His companion was not over two-and-twenty and quite prepossessing in appearance. There was nothing repulsive in the looks of either of the men, but there was enough in their actions to satisfy Zora that they were outlaws, but not of a class devoid of all the principles of humanity.

The storm ceased as suddenly as it had sprung up; that is, it ceased to snow about the time of Zora's capture, and in ten minutes time the wind had shifted into the west, but blew as strong as ever. It was still cloudy and dark and the lake ran high, making the navigation more difficult than it had been; for, the change in the wind started the great packs of ice that had accumulated on the west end of the lake and sand-bars, crowding back toward the eastern extremity. At every stroke of the paddle, the outlaws were threatened with death by being crushed between two floes. It required great skill to avert disaster.

"My dear young lady," said Zora's guard, on recovering from a sudden shock of a floe that almost upset their boat, "I am astonished at the bravery that you and your father have shown in venturing out on this lake to-night."

"It seems that the same compliment is applicable to yourselves, whether you were acting by a good or mercenary motive," said Zora, throwing aside her vail.

The rays of the lantern fell full upon her face, which gave emphasis to her words—a face of remarkable beauty and symmetry of outline. She could not have been over eighteen years of age, yet was a type of lovely womanhood. Her eyes were of a dark blue, mild as a summer sky, and possessed of an expression that gave tone to the sweet purity of her young heart. A decision of character, a fearlessness of spirit, a kind and gentle nature, were stamped upon every feature of the pretty white face framed in by the borders of her hood.

"Whatever our object may have been in venturing out here," replied her guard, "rest assured that no harm shall come to you while under our protection, providing you answer truly one question which I desire to ask you."

"How will you know whether I answer truly or not?" replied the maiden.

"Yours is a face that will not acquiesce in the falsehood of the tongue," was the man's reply. "The question is this: are you not the daughter of Hubert Ames, formerly of Tennessee?"

"Sir, I shall decline to answer any and all questions that you may ask about myself or my father," she replied, her voice tinged with scorn.

"Then I will have to refuse you liberty. When you answer the question, then will you be set free. I know where you live, my dear girl, and have for the last year; the cavern on the Wolf is no great secret to me. I saw you and your father lowered from the rock into your canoe, and saw you depart on your mission. I was aware of what brought you out on the lake. It was to save the life of that young sportsman, Sydney Graham, with whom I dare say you are in love, else you would not have ventured out on such a night. If your father is Hubert Ames, as I have reason to believe he is, he is here from no desire of his own—in fact, he is here to escape the penalty of the law, and dead or alive we will take him. We are officers of justice sent in search of him, and we will not shrink from our duty. But if we knew certainly that it was he, we might effect some compromise through you."

"Is that what you captured me for?" Zora asked.

"It is."

"I see by this you are not what you pretend to be," she replied, disdainfully; "if you were sent here as officers of the law, to arrest my father, your course is plain, and were you not rascals instead of officers, you would not propose a compromise with a criminal. If you have not murdered my father already, you will yet come to grief."

"Your father was not injured by us, though we might have arrested him had we not thought he would be an incumbrance in getting ashore. If he finds our canoe, he may escape, but I hardly think he will find Sydney Graham. It was by the merest accident we found him. We were shadowing your canoe by your light, and getting in ahead of you, struck the ice-pack and landed. There we found the young man and did what we could for him. But, heavens, how the wind blows! ay! steady, Proc, a floe's struck us—bear to the right."

An immense ice-raft had struck them, and in attempting to escape, they ran against another, whose slow movement proved an impediment to their flight; and to escape being crushed, they were compelled to pull to the right, and pass around it. Even this movement was attended with great dangers, for the winds and waves, beating against the side of the craft, kept it dragging against the edge of the leeward floe.

Zora was observed by her captor to gather her skirts closely around her, and adjust her cloak as if to render herself more comfortable from the raw, damp wind and chilly spray. Her guard never once dreamed of the desperate resolution that was momentarily growing stronger in her breast.

On moved the canoe. Dark clouds were scudding across the face of the struggling moon. The waves washed along the shore, and the winds shrieked in demoniac glee. Suddenly the little craft was hurled against a floe with such violence that its slight frame cracked. A shriek rent the air—a shriek of terror and of triumph. With fearful violence the waves beat against the canoe, which, having turned an angle of the floe, shot away with wonderful rapidity over the seething water.

When the little craft had been brought once more under control, a cry burst from the lips of one of the men. He had discovered that Zora was *not in the canoe!*

"Great God, Proc, she's gone!" the villain cried; "our game's lost—was swept overboard when that last squall came. Pull, man, for the shore! pull, if you value our lives worth the saving!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

"AN ILL WIND THAT BLOWS NO GOOD."

THE two outlaws were mistaken in the fate of Zora. She had not been drowned as they believed, but, when the canoe struck the floe, she arose to her feet and sprung toward the ice. The wind being in her favor, it almost lifted her from the canoe onto the raft, and hurried her forward several rods before she could check her footsteps. When she did, the moon, struggling forth at this juncture, enabled her to see that her captors were gone—she was safe from their power!

Overcome with emotions of joy, she sunk upon her knees, and in the fullness of her young heart, she lifted her voice to Heaven in a prayer of thanks. When she arose to her feet, a hand was laid upon her shoulder, and a voice said:

"God bless you, Zora!"

She turned quickly. The light of a lantern, hitherto kept concealed, streamed in her face.

"Oh, father!—dear father, you too are safe!" she cried, throwing herself into her father's arms.

"My child, how came you lost?" the old man asked.

Zora told him in as brief a manner as possible, and by the time she had concluded, her father was deeply agitated.

"They asked if I was Hubert Ames; what did you tell them?" he answered.

"That I would not answer their questions concerning you or myself."

"Then they do not know that I *am* Hubert Ames?"

"Not by my telling, though they mistrust as much. But, father, did you find that?"

"Young man? I did; he is on the opposite side of this floe. He is alive, though weak and numb from cold. He was unconscious when I found him, but I soon roused him from his stupor."

A light of joy beamed in the dark-blue eyes of the fair Zora, and her young heart beat wildly with its pent-up emotions of maidenly gladness and felicity.

Hubert Ames led the way across the floe, his own heart made happy and joyous by the restoration of his child. Slowly and carefully they picked their footsteps across the ice.

The father and daughter soon came to where Sydney Graham reclined, in a half-stupor, upon the ice.

Hubert Ames had found him upon the floe, wrapped in a blanket, and when he had aroused him from his lethargy and questioned him, the young man knew nothing of how the blanket came around him. The wind soon drove the floe, upon which they stood, off the bar; and it was then that Ames told Graham of his loss—of the mysterious disappear-

ance of his daughter, and of the object that had brought them out onto the lake. Sydney was startled by the old man's words, and essayed to regain his feet, but numbness and cold almost paralyzed his whole frame, and he failed to rise.

Suddenly Ames, who was on the look-out for some clue to his missing child, descried a light behind them, and leaving Graham he closed his lantern and hurried across the floe to meet his daughter in the manner already described.

"Thank God, young man, she is safe," the happy father said, as they drew near the reclining form of Sydney; "a merciful Providence has sent her back to me."

Sydney raised his eyes, and in the glare of the lantern he beheld Zora's pretty white face and rosy cheeks, to which the keen, cold winds lent an additional rosee hue. He started up. The blood that had been moving in cold, sluggish currents through his veins, now leaped in hot waves from his heart, and thrilled through the whole body with all the impulsive vigor of youth. He recognized the face of the girl. It was the same one that had so long been engraved upon his heart—the one that he had seen long months before reflected in the then clear, still waters of Otter Tail Lake. The young man was greatly surprised and embarrassed, for his plight was anything but presentable; and in confusion of mind he staggered to his feet and spoke to the object of his heart's adoration for the first time. The circumstances under which they met furnished a ready theme for conversation, and after acknowledging the father's informal introduction, Sydney remarked:

"It is under rather trying and peculiar circumstances that we meet, Miss Ames."

"It is indeed," she replied, "so very trying that it is not likely we will ever forget our first meeting."

"The night has been a terrible one, even for me, on this lake, and it is a wonder that you have not perished with the cold."

"I have suffered some," she replied, "but the greatest dangers are now past, and as the object of our adventure has been successful, I feel very thankful it was undertaken."

"I owe you and your father a debt of gratitude," Sydney replied; "and if God spares me from this night—"

He did not finish the sentence. With a crash the floe struck the beach, throwing the trio almost prostrate upon the ice. A cloud came over them—one whose ragged edges, outlined against the sky, appeared almost within reach. Before them rose a dark, impenetrable wall of unnatural gloom.

Hubert Ames, the exile, cast a glance around him, and then a light of recognition beamed upon his face.

"We have drifted home—we are directly under the Wolf!" he exclaimed.

"Then, thank God, we *are* safe," said Zora, joyfully.

"Mr. Graham," said Hubert Ames, "I beg you will accept the hospitality of our secluded home for the remainder of this eventful night."

"My dear, sir," responded Sydney, "I am already indebted to you for my life, and now I can not inflict myself upon your hospitality, when I can see no way of ever rewarding you. Besides, sir, there is something which tells me your home is not open to strangers."

"In this you are right, young man. But the same motive that led me to your rescue, induces me to invite you into our rude, hidden home."

"Your motives, then, are good," replied Graham; "but if your home and life are secrets which you still desire to remain secrets, I do not see why you would take an entire stranger into it."

"You have already acknowledged that you owe us a life of gratitude. Would you be repaying a tithe of it by saying aught of what we desire to remain a secret?"

"Ah, you trust me, then," exclaimed Sydney, his eyes beaming with joy. "While I would not inflict myself upon your further kindness, the same motive that led me into danger induces me to accept your kind invitation to remain with you till morning."

Zora's eyes brightened and her heart filled with joy at his words. In her heart she asked whether or not that motive which he spoke was the motive of a reciprocal love.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LARRY O'RAY.

LARRY O'RAY could scarcely believe the evidence of his own senses, when, on being admitted to the stone defense of

his party, the room was suddenly flooded with the light of a lamp brought in from an adjoining apartment. He rubbed his eyes to assure himself that the sight was not an unnatural illusion. But that all was as it really appeared, he had still more forcible evidence when a powerful Sioux warrior advanced toward him and said, in tolerable English.

"Give up gun—knife—everything."

Resistance was useless. There were a dozen warriors in the room armed to the teeth. At one side sat Bowie-knife Ben and five of the amateur hunters, all securely bound and gagged. He took in the situation at a glance. The whites had been deceived and captured in the same way as himself, for there were no signs of a struggle within the cabin.

"Arrah, now yees roarin' varlets, and it's shmart as sin yees think yees are to catch a bloind Irishman," exclaimed O'Ray, assuming an attitude of hostility; "but moind now, and it's me same self that 'll not bear tamperin' with no more than a hornit's jav'lin. Masha! I'm as phull av poising as a rhattlesnake—I am; so stand back or whack she goes—back! Whoop, yees bloody brat, and take that, and that, and—"

The Irishman, snatching a wooden pin from the wall, and improvising a shelalah of it, began playing upon the tufted heads of the red-skins with such an energy and vim as made times lively for the foe. But this lasted for only a minute. Half a dozen warriors rushed in upon him, and all went down in a heap together. But from amid the confusion of flying limbs and bobbing, tufted heads, those of our friends already prisoners, saw the form of O'Ray suddenly emerge, his club still in hand, and his face wearing the expression of desperation. He had been transformed from the easy, good-natured Larry O'Ray to a very demon. His inborn antipathy toward the red-skins, and a knowledge of what would be likely to follow captivity, fired his soul with superhuman powers, and for a while it seemed as though victory would crown his unaided efforts. Already three of the foe lay bleeding and dying, while scarcely one in the room was without an injury.

Maddened by the Irishman's single-handed success, the savages closed in upon him again and again; and at length a blow from behind felled the heroic fellow, unconscious, to the floor, when he was rudely seized and dragged across the room and doubly secured with thongs of undressed deer-skin.

All hopes of escape faded from the breast of Bowie-knife Ben and his companions when they saw Larry fall.

The latter was arranged in a position near Ben as soon as he recovered from his unconsciousness, and a guard set over him. Then the savages renewed the farce by which Ben, Larry and most of the amateurs had been led into their present predicament. A fierce yell of approaching warriors without, was silenced by the clash of a dozen rifles inside, when the former would fall back to the woods apparently in great disorder. A dozen times or more this was repeated, but it seemed as though there were no more victims to decoy into the trap. Captain Graham was absent, it is true, and had been expected with Larry, by his friends, and no doubt by the savages; but, as the prisoners were not permitted to confer with each other, the Irishman could not acquaint his friends with the mysterious disappearance of Sydney. So, they were kept in an agony of suspense, expecting every moment to hear the captain's demand for admittance to danger instead of safety.

The Indians without kept up their sham attack and those within their vigorous defense; and our friends were sorely and sadly afraid their patience was about to be rewarded with another victim, when the quick, loud raps of some one without jarred the door.

A savage hastily opened a sliding shutter to a small window and gazed out. He could see the dark outlines of a figure at the door, and while he was endeavoring to make out the character, a voice bawled out:

"Be you a-goin' to let me in, you fire-blasted fools? Don't you know who I be? Are you a set o' durned catawampus, not to know my stately tread and musical voice? Open this door, or by ther Olympian goddesses I'll tare down the shanty, I will."

The door was opened, and Jeduthan Turk came dancing into the room in a state of great exuberance. But when he discovered the house full of warriors and Bowie-knife Ben and his companions prisoners, his glee turned to astonishment, or rather he affected such an emotion; for, at a glance, Ben saw that there was an understanding between him and the Indians.

"Merciful man on high!" the old renegade exclaimed "what in the name o' the adorable? What a conglomerated mess o' a crowd have I got into? Ingins and white mixed up like water and grease. Can't be I've run into danger, can it? Cuss my ole hulk, if I don't b'lieve thar's a slight conflagration here, I swan I do."

"You needn't put that all on, ye rampin' ole traitor, you," retorted Ben, who had been allowed the freedom of his tongue. "I reckon as what I kin see cl'ar through yer little game. This 'ere's all been put up by you and your p'isen Injin friends. I sw'ar I wish I'd a-gutted you, Turk, when I met yet tunnelin' under the snow-drift. But, never mind, ole posey; the devil's got it laid up fur you when you go home to him."

"You tell 'im, won't ye, that I'll be along by-and-by?" retorted Turk, "for it does 'pear to me, Ben Bowie, that you're bout to take yer passage, now ben't you?"

"Och, swate mither of man!" exclaimed Larry, "and gladly would mees doie, if mees could git one wee morsel av a squaze at yer throat, ye bloody brat!"

"Ho! ho! ho! Irisher, I didn't know as what you war here," retorted the renegade, fairly doubling himself in his demonstrative laugh. "I swaney, I never see'd you here afore, Bogtrotter. But to come right to the p'int, that war de-licious likker we had t'other night, now wa'n't it? Why, it'd jist fetch a dead man right outen his grave, it would, I'll be switched."

"Shet up yer infurnal mountain-gap, ye owld outcast yees, for divil the bit of sinse are there in yer idyotic ravings. It'd look more sinsible av yees if ye'd arrange these cussed strings so's they'd not hurt me limbs so."

"It wouldn't do, Bogtrot, unless I'd go back on the boys here," replied Turk, jerking his thumb over his shoulder toward the Indians. "They've stood by me through thick and thin, fire and foes, and I'm not the man to desert them when a little ticklish work, sich as scalpin' and burnin' you fellers, are to be did. No, sir; I'm more o' a man, than that, Bogtrot. I'm sorry fur you fellers on 'count o' yer color, but ye be awful reckless o' life, so now you'll have to grin and bear't, I swan you will. You've consolashun in knowin', howsumever, that you'll not have to die, but onct', and won't know anything 'bout this world o' trials when yer bodies are burnt up and the ashes blowin' all over the kentry."

"Such a cool, murderous-hearted wretch I didn't suppose lived," said Town Barry, one of the amateurs.

At this juncture Red Arrow, the chief of the party, interposed, and other savages coming in, dispositions were made for the disposal of the prisoners. Turk had a prominent voice in the arrangements, and when all had been satisfactorily arranged, he and one of the warriors left the house. In half an hour they returned, Turk carrying a small iron hooped cask, and the savage a square package wrapped in brown paper.

The prisoners exchanged significant looks. They recognized the cask as one belonging to their stock of high-wines; and the package in the paper as one of their boxes of cigars that had been *cached* in a cavern not over fifty rods away; and where they supposed no one could ever find them. The readiness, however, with which Turk and the savage went and procured the brandy and cigars, was evidence of their having known where to lay hands upon the articles.

A shudder of horror and despair passed over the prisoners when Turk brought the liquor into the room. They well knew its potent powers would excite the brains of the savages, and add new fuel to their already excited, revengeful spirits.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A SPIRIT CAROUSE.

"You see, my dear fellers," said Turk, depositing the cask upon the floor and seating himself upon it, "you see, don't you now, that I've cornfisticated yer likker? And why not, bless me?—you'll not need it in the great hereafter, and in course it'd sour and breed snakes if it stayed into that cave."

"It's not the fust you've stolen, either," said Ben.

"Why, bless you no, Ben Bowie. I've been playin' on the boys' kags every nite fur a pesky good spell. But I alers give as much as I took—a pint of water fur a pint of essence; in course I did. As you didn't know it, why, what's the difference, I'd ax ye?"

"Yees are a murtherin' ould thafe, make the best av yees," remarked O'Ray.

"Twa'n't regler stealin'; Bogtrot, kase as how I took it onto a writ of attachment fur rent—storage; fur that are cave are the identikel, self-constituted property o' your'n truly, Jeduthan Turk, it be. I entered it one night, accordin' to Kongress, in ther year of our Lord, eighteen hundred and fifty-five; tharfore she be mine to luv, cherish and protect till—"

"The devil comes fur yees," interrupted O'Ray, with an ever-ready tongue.

"Have it yer own way, Bogtrotter," replied Turk, resignedly; "but I be a-gorin' to tap this 'ere kag and inspect the percentage o' snap and drunk thar be in it."

So saying, the renegade proceeded to open the bung of the cask; this being accomplished, the liquor was drawn in such vessels as were found in the cabin, and in such quantities as would give each warrior a share. In a few minutes every savage was crowding, struggling and yelling around the renegade, calling madly for more of the liquid that was firing their brains and fast converting them into demons.

Bowie-knife Ben regarded the whole with a sense of the most profound horror. He was satisfied that the moment the cravings of the savages were sated with liquor, blood would flow even more freely to gratify their insatiate thirst for vengeance.

"Boys," the little hunter whispered to his nearest companions, "I think as what our race is 'bout run. Jist as soon as that likker gives out, we'll catch it, hot and heavy, now mind. If any of you're in the habit of sayin' pray-words, let me admonish you to be about it, fur we're liable to drap off at any moment. And say: jist mention my name as a subject fur mercy in yer prayers... Ya-as, boys, that's a thousand deaths in that tormented kag of likker if set to motion by 'em red hellions an' that ole doubly-strained and rectified essence of sin, Jeduth Turk. Lor', I could die easy if I could jist git one fair rip at that ongrateful thief's jug'lar; and the thought that I can't, hurts me worse nor death itself."

"He is a most remarkable man," said young Barry, "notwithstanding his base treachery. One would judge he had a human heart—probably had once, but it has become hardened to crime."

"Yes, lad; but the devil will wake him some day, and then he will think of God and the judgment bar. Thar's consolation in that to me, there is, I swear to goodness."

By this time the cask had been drained of its contents, and Turk proceeded to open the cigar-box, which contained some of the choicest brands of Havanas, and which proved wonderful curiosities to the savages. Not one of them had ever seen the "weed" in this shape, and they were disposed to regard them with caution, as one would an infernal machine. Turk, however, soon enlightened them upon the subject, and illustrated their use by a practical example. In a few minutes every warrior had a cigar lit, and was puffing away like a portable engine, his cheeks, with each puff, swelling ut almost to bursting.

The scene had now assumed something of the ludicrous, as well as the terrible, and Bowie-knife Ben could not regard it without a smile. The liquor had not yet affected the brains of the Indians so as to deaden their savage curiosity, which had become so greatly exercised over the cigars. In fact, the weed in this form seemed to transport them with delight, and appeared even more delicious and pleasing to their tastes than the brandy. This was attested by the almost violent energy with which all worked, seeming to think that the harder he labored the greater would be the enjoyment. Great clouds of smoke rolled from the lips or nostrils of each warrior, while the cigar itself played in and out between the moistened lips like a piston rod. The face had assumed a lugubrious expression, while the eyes looked straight down the nose to see how the work went on, or rolled listlessly and drowsily about the room.

Turk sat upon the cask, smoking in a more easy and natural way; at the same time regarding his dusky allies with an expression that seemed to threaten an outburst of hearty laughter. Red Arrow stalked about the room in all his usual savage dignity, his besotted face wearing a dull, listless expression, and in his small black eyes a burning, vacant stare. So deeply engrossed was he in the delights of the one Havana, that he suddenly conceived the idea of increasing them, and acting upon the suggestion of his cravings, he lit another cigar and indulged in the double pleasure of two cigars at the same time.

The room being close, with but little ventilation, it soon became filled with the smoke of the highly-flavored Havanas, which was not altogether unpleasant to the olfactories of the prisoners. It was evident, however, that the fumes of the burning weed were hastening the effect of the frequent libations of the savages, for some of them began to stagger about and mutter in maudlin tones; and now and then one would yawn drowsily and throw himself upon the floor in a drunken sleep. Others, more demonstrative, began dancing about the room, singing some wild, weird war-song, now and then giving vent to an unearthly yell that fairly chilled the blood in their helpless auditors' veins.

The prisoners did not entirely escape the violence of this drunken revel, for now and then a savage would emphasize a yell by planting his moccasined foot in the side of Bowie-knife Ben, or Larry O'Ray, who seemed to have engendered their especial hatred.

By this time the room had become filled almost to suffocation with the tobacco-smoke; and a general sneezing and coughing ensued. Several of the warriors had followed their chief's example, and indulged to the extent of two cigars at the same time; and under the drowsy, slumberous influence of the smoke, and the increasing delirious effect of the brandy, their savage ferocity became toned down to an almost harmless condition.

Turk, however, became all the more noisy and demonstrative, indulging in snatches of comic songs, odd, meaningless expressions, and quaint, ludicrous speeches.

"I say, Bog-trotter," he finally said, addressing O'Ray, "wouldn't it make you go off happier if ye had a wee swig of that 'ere juice?"

"Och, begorra! and niver a dhrap will mees tech again, if it makes sech fools and gaping idiots outen everybody as it does you 'uns."

"Oh, botheration, Bogtrot; you're foolishin' now, you be. I know your heart's fairly pattin' juber fur a horn o' likker. I'd give it to you in remembrance o' that stormy night you and Ben did the fair thing by me; but it won't do fur you to quit this world with a bad breath—oh, no; go with clean hands and face, Irisher, and I'll warrant Ole Nick will give you a good seat in the bog-trotters' corner. And now, Red Arrow, ole black-strap"—turning to the chief—"what d' you propose (hic) doin' now?"

Red Arrow looked at Turk with a doleful, imbecile leer, that was both repulsive and comical; and in a drunken tone, muttered a few incoherent words, then crammed his two cigars back into his mouth and continued his laborious puffing.

"Tickle my scalp, ole smoke-stack," replied Turk, suddenly seized with a violent, drunken hiccoughing, "yer (hic) muchly un'er the infloonce (hic) of likker, you be, man (hic). You're a durned (hic) hog—can't be mod'rate (hic) like me and Tim'thy (hic), of Bible fa-(hic)-ame, who took fur stum-(hic)-mick's sake only (hic)—cussed hog, you be."

The look that accompanied the final period of this lecture on intemperance, would have provoked any man into a fit of laughter, had he not stood face to face with death, as our friends did.

With an apparent contemptuous lowering of the eyes, and curl of the lip, the renegade turned away, lit a fresh cigar, and joined the warriors in their bacchanalian orgies. He became more wild and boisterous, as the influence of his indulgence grew upon him. He seemed to be impatient about the disposal of the prisoners, and kept questioning the chief in regard to the matter. But the mind of his Sioux highness, Red Arrow, was somewhat unsettled at the time, and he was compelled to defer decision.

Suddenly an idea seemed to have popped into Turk's bemuddled brain, and stopping, he confronted the chief, saying:

"I've got it, (hic) ole red-skin, I have. I'll tell ye (hic), too, I will, what to do (hic) with that 'ere set th-(hic)-re; jis' hol' yer (hic) year here—it's a secret—an' I'll whis-(hic)-per 't in yer year (hic), if ye're too busy to hear (hic) it out loud."

Turk staggered up to the chief, who was standing in the middle of the room, anxious to hear any suggestions that might lift some of the weight off his overtaxed brain. Jeduthan bent quickly forward to whisper in the chief's ear, but, in his own confusion of mind, he forgot to remove his cigar from his lips, and the fiery end was driven rather forcibly into the chief's ear.

A screech that might have awoken the dead pealed from his lips, and his huge form shot up into the air like a rubber

ball. Had the fire been applied to the soles of his feet, he could not have made a more quick or graceful spring than he did.

Turk burst into a roar of laughter, which terminated in a kick from the chief that sent the renegade sprawling on the floor, between Ben and Larry.

"Now—now (hic) durn your mystified ole brain (hic), I won't tell ye what I (hic) war gorin' to—I'd see (hic) ye siz-zlin' fust, I swan I would."

As he slowly gathered himself up, he pitched forward against Ben, in an awkward, drunken stagger. The hunter was about to let loose a shower of imprecations upon Turk, when he suddenly felt the cold blade of a knife inserted between his wrists, and felt its keen edge sever his bonds!

CHAPTER XXX.

OUT OF THE TOILS.

BOWIE-KNIFE BEN was greatly surprised by this sudden movement of Turk, for it was by a knife in his hand that the hunter's bonds were severed. He could not comprehend its meaning altogether, for, hitherto, every action of the renegade had been hostile toward him and his fellow-prisoners, and he never dreamed that such a thing would occur—that Turk's motives were all concealed behind his apparent inebriation.

Naturally enough, the little hunter hesitated to improve the first moments of his liberty, by attempting escape from the room; for such an act would have precipitated affairs, and drawn the bonds of captivity still tighter around his friends.

He wondered how Turk could possibly be a friend of his and an ally of the savages, and whether his intentions in bringing the brandy and cigars into the room were to intoxicate the Indians, and thereby divert their attention from the whites. Or, could it have been possible that he—Ben—was to be the sole object of Turk's mercy, in consideration of the hunter's kindness in saving his life that stormy night in the forest?

Ben kept his hands behind him, and feeling about with his fingers, discovered that Turk had dropped the knife on the floor at his back. This gave him new courage, for he was satisfied now that Turk had left it for his especial benefit.

The prisoners were all seated in a line closely together and taking up the knife, Ben reached carefully around behind O'Ray and severed his bonds, at the same time giving him a knowing glance. A light of joy mounted to the face of the Hibernian, and for a moment Ben was afraid his emotions would betray him.

The knife being left in Larry's hand, he slyly cut the bonds of his nearest companion, placed the knife in this companion's hand and signified, by a nudge, for him to perform a like duty for the next man in the line. By this means every man was free in less than three minutes, and all waited only for the chance to make a dash for the door and liberty.

None but Ben was aware of the source from whence this friendly aid had come, and so the hunter kept a close watch upon Turk's movements. He saw him pass out and back several times—each time, however, he closed the door quick as possible behind him.

The savages were still carousing around the room. In the dense, white smoke that obscured the light like an eclipse, they passed to and fro like fiends in a twilight revel—appearing wild, weird and unnatural.

Suddenly Turk uttered a low whistle of apparent surprise, at the same time glancing at our friends in a significant manner. Then he sprung across the floor and threw open the door and blew out the light.

A deep silence ensued, but was immediately succeeded by the rush of feet, the bounding of heavy bodies upon the floor, and a wild, drunken, savage yell.

Ben and his companion, had comprehended all in an instant, and the next moment they were upon their feet and out of the cabin.

"Wheel the corner," cried a voice, which all recognized as Turk's, the moment they were outside; "and at the side o' the house you'll find yer guns and ackutermints—snatch 'em—hurry—run—scat!"

The party turned the corner of the house as directed, each man snatching up one of the rifles without regard to ownership, and hastening on into the woods.

The savages, or those who were not too drunk, gave chase; but all their subtle instinct and crafty cunning had been rendered dead and torpid by the influence of the liquor, and they staggered hither and thither, grappling now and then with the trunk of a tree, or imaginary foes—gliding on with that vacant listlessness of somnambulists—with no earthly object in view.

Our friends evaded the red-skins without trouble, and by a detour around the valley, returned to the house where they had so lately been in confinement. The place was deserted by all the savages except three too drunk to walk. These were dragged outside, but Ben's humanity rebelled against offering them violence while in such a helpless condition.

The door was at once securely barred, and the room put in the best shape possible for defense. There was a large supply of ammunition and provision concealed in a kind of magazine under the floor, so the little party had no fears of coming to want in case of a protracted siege.

Ben now made inquiries regarding the absence of Captain Graham, and it was with a feeling of the profoundest grief and sorrow that they heard Larry's story of the captain's disappearance.

"Perhaps," said Ben, thoughtfully, "that gal, the cap'n's nearly distractioned about, has kaptered him!"

"It moight be sich a thing, Benny. She'd kapter ennything like a mon, for I'll be sworn if she ar'n't the swatest little morsel av humanity that iver wore hair, so she is begorra."

"Then you have seen her?"

"Bless yer sowl, and mees did. And she warn't alone either—anither gal war with her, and, och, but she war a rhose-bud, too, and the ither one called her Nora Mac-karthy."

"That's a bloody Irish name," said Ben.

"Ho, ho; and it's moighty roight yees are, Benny; and sweet as a brook is her voice, with jist *brogue* enuff to make it musical. A swate young crather is the colleen, and it's the smash she played wid me ould heart, so it is."

"Oho, I see into it now. You're in love, too, like the cap'n," replied Ben, with a chuckle. "I reckon as what purty weemon must grow like weeds down in the Valley of Shaders. Mebby that's one sproutin' for me thar."

"Oo! and it's on bended knee mees will tell the feelings av me heart to the swate, bunty little Nora Mackarthy the first toime I sees her again, so I will; and it—"

"I say, fellers, in thar," suddenly interrupted a voice from without, "if you've no objeeshins, I want to come in outen the damp, night atmosphere as don't agree with my delicate system. If thar's enny kordial left into that 'ere cask, I be wantin' it to moisten my laruyx. I sw'ar to goodness I hain't had a drap to-nite, but to git you fellers outen your last cholic, I almos' drowned myse'f outen my breeches pourin' of likker down my throat onto the *outside*, to fool 'em red-skins, I swan to nater I did."

"It's Jeduthan Turk, boys," said Ben. "He's a queer ole codger, but he saved us, so in he comes."

Ben opened the door, and the small, elastic figure of Jeduthan Turk shot into the room, executing a graceful hand-spring, and bringing up in the center of the room, exclaiming:

"Yoop-peel and yere's the springiest ole catawampus that ever sot trap 'r pulled trigger, fit b'ars 'r fooled Ingins—that's what ails Hanner," and he rounded off the final period with a shout that fairly startled his astonished auditors.

"I'll give it up, Turk—I'll cave, I will, by mighty," replied Bowie-knife Ben; "you're a mirakle, you be. Here, shake, and let's drink to eternal friendship; no dif'rence whether we meet by the camp-fire, in a tunnel under a snow-drift, in the woods, in a cabin full of Ingins, or in the great Hereafter."

CHAPTER XXXI.

AN IRISH MAID'S RECEPTION.

THREE days had gone by since the disappearance of Captain Graham, and all this time Bowie knife Ben and the amateur hunters lingered in the vicinity of Outer Tail Lake in hopes of finding some trace of him. But every effort was baffled, and Ben finally came to the conclusion that he had been captured and carried away by the Indians to their vil-

lage, and proposed an advance upon that stronghold. The proposition met with general favor, but on the evening previous to the day upon which the party was to start to the village, an event occurred that entirely changed the programme they had laid down.

They were encamped on the southern shore of Otter Tail Lake, and toward the close of the day, Ben and Larry left camp to make a final reconnaissance around the Valley of Shadows, each one taking a different course.

The day had been exceedingly warm and pleasant, and the evening was one of a soft, dreamy mildness. Not a breath of air was stirring, but on every side that low, mysterious voice of nature could be heard droning forth its mournful cadences.

The sun hung just above the horizon, its red beams shooting aslant the blue sky and quivering along the earth, when a solitary figure crept out from the belt of gloom skirting the southern side of the Valley of Shadows, and stealing along the base of the bluff, made his way toward the Wolf.

It was Larry O'Ray, who had detected smoke rising from the summit of the rock, and had determined to know more of its secrets by approaching it, and scaling its heights after darkness set in. He had proceeded but a short distance, however, when the sound of voices arrested his attention. Peering through a strip of shrubbery that separated him from the speakers, he discovered two females sauntering leisurely along the valley. He recognized them as the same persons he had seen the day Captain Graham disappeared. One was Zora Ames, the daughter of the exile of the Valley of Shadows, the other, Nora Mackarthy, with whom Larry had averred he was in love.

The scout's heart fluttered wildly as he gazed upon the face of Nora. It was a case of love at first sight, and ever since the day he had first obtained that sight, Nora's face had been uppermost in his mind. He had been patrolling the valley for three days, feeling that there was no sacrifice he would not willingly make to obtain another glimpse of the idol of his heart. And now his greatest desire was realized; and he tried to content himself by feasting his eyes upon her, but the caprices of love are exacting—never satisfied; the emotions of his starving heart overcame his discretion, and he rushed from his covert and confronted the females.

"Howdy—good-morning, ladies!" he exclaimed, confusedly, doffing his hat and extending his hand toward Nora, at the same time bowing and smiling in a manner intended to be polite and friendly.

The females were startled by his sudden, unceremonious intrusion, and shrank back with alarm; but the quick eye of Nora took in the situation at a glance, and stepping boldly up to the hunter extended her hand as if to grasp his, but quickly transferred it to his face, whereon she gave him a violent slap that forced an exclamation from his lips more forcible than elegant.

"There now," she exclaimed, "take that fur yer imudence, and learn how yees freighten two innocent girls again, ye mane spalpeen."

"Och, bedad, and mees took yees for a decent Irish girl, mees did," affirmed Larry, tartly; "but it's a she-bear yees are, by the Howly Mither."

A roar of laughter emanated from a thicket hard-by, and the next moment Bowie-knife Ben and Jeduthan Turk issued therefrom, their faces convulsed with laughter.

"I swan if that wer'n't a cool reception, Bogtrotter," said Turk; "I swan I'd have a kiss for the lick or die. I swan I would."

"Blessed Virgin, and mees big pardon," said Nora, apologetically, when she discovered that Turk and Larry were friends; "and it's a loafin' rinegate mees thought yees war, Misher Bogtrotter, although mees moight have seen yees wore the face of an Irish gentleman."

"Arrah, now, and that sounds beither!" exclaimed Larry, and his whole face broadened into a smile, that showed all the plainer the livid imprint of Nora's hand.

A reconciliation was soon effected between Larry and the idol of his dreams, though all was owing to the intercession of Turk and Ben. Then the latter took the Irishman aside and said:

"Larry, I have found Captain Graham!"

"Oh, glory!" shouted the excited Irishman.

"I want you to go at once to the camp and tell the boys that I'll be thar with the cap'n afore midnight."

"And whar am the captiug, Benny?"

"This man Turk, who turns out to be our best friend on the border, will take me to whar the cap'n are."

"Holy Mother! and it's roight jolly news it am, and won't the b'y's shout fur glory when they hear it? But I wonder if the captiug 's in love yit, Benny?"

"I reckon he be; and he's a fool if he arn't, for that's the gal thar that's about discomboborated his heart. But, Larry, it's nearly night, and we'll have to be trappin'."

With a bow intended for all, though entirely bestowed upon Nora, with an accompanying smile, Larry reluctantly took his departure from the Valley of Shadows. But he went with a light heart, for Nora had recognized his parting bow with an approving, coquettish smile.

CHAPTER XXXII.

WILMA MEREDITH'S PERIL.

A SMALL canoe was being leisurely propelled up the Sauk river between the settlement of Lakeside and the cabin of the missionary, Father St. Ule. It contained two occupants—both females—young and handsome. One was Wilma Meredith, the settler's daughter, the other Sybil St. Ule, the missionary's daughter. With the former the reader is already acquainted, and although the latter has figured in our story, we have never described her.

Sybil St. Ule was a handsome woman, whose perfect physique and intellectual attainments indicated a person of five-and-twenty, but evidently she was not over eighteen summers of age. Her hair and eyes were black as a raven's wing; her complexion of a fresh, olive tint, and her general features, symmetrical in mold and strong in expression. There was a regal air in all her movements, an imperious flash in the dark eyes, and a tinge of hauteur on the delicately-chiseled lips. In size she was a little above the medium, and dressed in a style that set off her beauty to the best advantage. She had been down at Lakeside visiting Wilma, and now Wilma was going home with her to spend a few of the bright spring days in the quiet retreat of the missionary's cabin.

Wilma's face wore a pale, sad look. The color had faded from her cheeks, and her voice had lost much of its musical sweetness. Her heart was sad and refused to be comforted, for she mourned the death of her lover, Nathan Reeve, of whom no trace had been found since the night he fell in the duel. This bereavement fell heavily upon Wilma's heart. There was nothing to wait for, so far as Nathan was concerned; for the decision of Bowie-knife Ben had destroyed all possible hope of his ever returning alive. The bloody trail from where he fell, the hole in the ice and the crimson stain upon its edges—all told the little hunter too plainly of Nathan's fate.

It was a beautiful April day. The sun shone bright and warm; the birds sung along the shores among the budding trees; the river rippled on with a soft, low murmur; and all nature seemed ripe with music and joy, as though it was capable of rejoicing over its release from the icy thrall of winter. But none of these beauties of nature brought joy to Wilma's heart. Sybil endeavored to win her mind away from her troubles, but they were as deep-rooted in her heart, as had been her love for Nathan Reeve.

Sybil was using the paddle which she handled with remarkable ease and skill. They had arrived opposite the mouth of the creek, or channel that connects the river with Fall Lake, when Wilma, glancing around, then down at the clear waters, buried her face in her hands and burst into tears.

"Why, Wilma, my dear girl," said Sybil, in a consoling voice, "what has induced this new outburst of grief?"

"Oh, Sybil," replied Wilma, in sadness of heart; "I was just thinking that we were on the very spot where poor Nathan's body was put under the ice."

"Yes; this is about the place. But, dear Wilma, don't let your sorrow kill you. Try and dismiss it from your mind. You are too young to die of a broken heart."

Wilma's lips curled slightly with scorn, and an unusual luster kindled in her eyes. There was something in her companion's tone, and the look that accompanied it that wounded her feelings, and led her to think that her friend spoke lightly of her sorrow and the love she cherished for the memory of her dead lover.

Before Wilma could reply, however, something came in contact with the prow of their canoe, and being seated with

her back to their course, she turned her head and discovered that a large bunch of dry, matted brush had floated against the boat. She put out her hand to push it aside, but withdrew it as quickly as though a serpent had been coiled up within its meshes. She had caught sight of a pair of blazing eyes looking up at her from a painted, dusky face!

"Oh, Heaven, Sybil!" she cried, in terror, "there are Indians under that brush!"

Before Sybil could reply, the brush was pushed aside, and two savages, by a sudden, agile spring, threw themselves into the canoe without scarcely rocking it.

"Hooh!" exclaimed one of the villains, with an apparent shudder, "water heap cold—guess ride little—perty squaws—one for me—one for Black Elk—ugh!"

Sybil and Wilma screamed for help, but their cries must have been unheard. For fear, however, that they might be, the savages seized them, and having bound their hands, tied a bandage over their mouths and eyes, thereby rendering them helpless, speechless and blind.

This done, one of the red-skins took up the paddle and turned the canoe upon the water several times, then moved away. This was done to confuse the minds of the captives, and they could not tell whether they were being taken up or down-stream, or whether they had turned into the passage leading into Fall Lake.

In this manner they were taken on and on for some length of time. Finally the boat put ashore, and the prisoners being landed, were conducted away through the woods in what appeared to be a winding, tortuous course.

They finally came to a halt where Wilma was sure she could hear the murmur of water not far distant. Her conductors exchanged a few words in the Indian dialect with some friend whom they had met; then she was led forward into a kind of a building or cavern. She did not know whether Sybil was by her or not, for she was still kept blindfolded. She was conscious of being taken across a hard floor—through a narrow door—down a flight of stairs into what appeared to be a dismal, poorly-ventilated cave. Here she was permitted to be seated, when her blindfold and bonds were removed.

The lurid glare of an oil-lamp dazed her sight, and before her eyes had become accustomed to the light, she heard the footsteps of her captor retreating. She found that she was surrounded by walls of solid earth, and alone. Sybil was not with her. Above her was what appeared to be a floor—probably the same across which she was conducted when first led out of the open air. She could hear the soft, massive tread of feet crossing it, ever and anon. Now and then she could hear the faint murmur of voices and the opening and closing of a door. By these sounds she came to the conclusion that she was in a vault under some building. But, where was that building situated? Why had she been confined in such a dismal place? Would she ever see the light of day again? Was she doomed to a fate far worse than death?

These were the questions Wilma asked herself, and the terrible thoughts that followed completely prostrated her courage and filled her soul with horror. Her brain grew dizzy, her limbs refused to support her, and she sunk unconscious to the earth.

She never knew how long she remained unconscious upon her prison floor; when she recovered, she found she was still lying where she fell, but there was no friendly hand about to soothe her aching brow, nor give her water to cool her parched and feverish lips.

Her lamp had burned low, and was sputtering and flickering as if struggling hard to keep ablaze.

Rising to her feet with great effort, she seated herself upon a rude bench and tried to think.

She was startled by a heavy脚步 and the sound of a familiar voice in the room overhead.

"Howdy, father?" she heard the voice say; "mortal glad be I to git back here onc't more to find you and yer gal sound and well. You're lookin' well, uncle—tor-ment it, gal, but you be growin' pertier every day. How's both yer healths? How's red skins hereaways? I see'd gobs of track around? How's times?—how's Bible-makin'?—how's every thing? I sw'ar to nature, I'm glad to wag yer paw, uncle, I be."

Wilma's heart seemed to rise up in her throat as she listened to these words of greeting. It was the voice of Bowie-knife Ben, and his words were addressed to Father St. Ule and his daughter Sybil. Of this, there was not a doubt left in her confused and troubled mind.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE SECRETS OF THE WOLF.

As soon as Larry O'Ray took his departure from the Valley of Shadows for the camp of the amateur hunters, Bowie-knife Ben, Zora Ames and Nora Mackarthy set out in the direction of the Wolf, led by Jeduthan Turk, who seemed familiar with every step of the valley.

They soon reached the base of the Wolf, when the guide led the way up a natural acclivity along the side of the rock, and finally stopped under a jutting rock where further ascent was totally impossible. As there was no opening in the side of the rock visible Ben began to wonder what advantage they had gained by climbing the rock to that point, when Turk placed his lips to a crevice in the rock and blew a shrill whistle. A minute later a section of the rock facade rolled inward, revealing a spacious opening beyond in the heart of the Wolf.

"Foller," said Turk, entering the secret passage.

The next minute Ben found himself in an open court, surrounded on all sides by a thick wall of stone whose sides were pierced by numerous small caverns. This hollow in the center of the great rock which could not be seen from the adjacent bluffs, had the appearance of the mouth of a crater, while its surroundings showed signs of volcanic action.

Ben was not a little surprised, for he had always believed that the Wolf was a solid rock.

A man past middle age met them at the door as they filed in, and the instant the last one was in, he closed and barred the entrance.

"This yere," said Turk, turning to Ben, although he addressed the man who had admitted them, "is the king-cock o' the walk, Mr. Ames. It be Bowie-knife Ben, the great, big little catawampus o' the north—the sprightliest, springiest little brat that ever sunk tooth or dug nail into a red-skin."

"I am glad to meet you, Bowie-knife Ben," said Mr. Ames, in recognition of Turk's introductory remarks, as he advanced to the little hunter with extended hand.

"Tor-ment it, gineral," replied Ben, "I'll be blowed up to the moon if this don't take the rag of'en the pole. What's the name?"

"Hubert Ames," replied the old man, "a name that has been—but no difference now, Bowie-knife; there are others waiting to see you."

He turned and conducted the hunter into a cave at one side of the court. A light had already been lit, and its beams flooded the apartment with a mellow radiance, revealing the whole of the interior, that was furnished with all the taste and comforts that the heart could desire. On a sofa at one side lay the form of a youth who was asleep, and by his side sat a man reading a small book. The latter Ben readily recognized as Captain Sydney Graham, who laid aside his book as the party entered the cave, and advanced to meet Ben, saying:

"I am glad to meet you, old friend."

"Holy Moses, cap'n!" exclaimed Ben, grasping the youth's hand. "This are joy, I swear it be. Man alive!—we've mourned you as dead, these three days, and here you been in peace and plenty, keepin' us all in a stew."

"I couldn't help it, Ben; the Indians have been watching us narrowly ever since I came here. But, do you recognize that face?" and he turned and pointed to the face of the youth asleep upon the sofa.

Ben looked at the face and shook his head. It was thin and bloodless, almost ghastly in its emaciation.

"Take a close look, Bowie," said Turk.

"It 'pears to me," said Ben, scanning the features narrowly, "it looks kinder nateral, but—goodness of Heaven! inadorable mercy, it can't be him, can it? It ar'n't Nathan, is it?—Nathan Reeve?"

"It is what thar's left o' the lad," replied Turk.

"Tor-ments! I'd like to understand this 'ere arrangements, I would, by Joses."

"All can be soon explained," said Ames. "Ever since the night of the duel Nathan has been here, hovering between life and death. He's mending now very fast since the mild weather set in. He's sleeping under the influence of some medicine I gave him awhile ago, and it's best to let him rest while he can. It was an ugly wound he received."

"Glory to Him on high," muttered Ben, his whole frame a quiver with pent-up joy, "and Nathan's alive! Good, noble, brave Natty Reeve. Lor', how it 'll tickle little Wilma—her cheeks 'll gather their roses ag'in, and sunshine 'll

bu'st forth on her pretty face and eyes. 'But, it's curious—downright curious; I sw'ar I thought I tracked a bloody trail to whar some fiend had chucked the boy under the ice."

"Ah, that was all a trick of my friend Titan, the Terror of the North, to mislead Nathan's enemies. Titan brought him here, and I have doctored him until he is nearly well."

"Tor-ments! This is a surprise—the Wolf's chuck full of them, I sw'ar it be. But, gineral, what are you folks a-doin' in this outlandish kentry, ennyhow? It ar'n't the place fur the likes of her," and he pointed to Zora, who was busily engaged assisting Nora prepare supper.

"I have had to live here, and that's good enough for a reason; and while supper is in course of preparation, I'll tell you the whole secret of my life of seclusion. You have doubtless heard of old John Brown, who got up a negro insurrection about two years ago, and who was hung for the same. Well, at that time I resided in Tennessee, although I was a Northern man by birth and education. I was in strong sympathy with Brown's movement of freeing the slaves, and arranged to co-operate with him, with a large force of negroes, as soon as his insurrection extended into Tennessee.

"We thought that as soon as the first blow was struck, all the slaves of the South, and the abolitionists of the North, would flock to our standard and aid in crushing out the curse of our land. But alas, for human hopes! Brown was caught and hung, and, as I had aided and abetted him, I knew my complicity would not be kept a secret, so in order to save my life, I was compelled to flee the country. A large reward was offered for my arrest, and saying nothing of certain sections of the Fugitive Slave Law, I knew the reward was too great for me ever to live in peace even in the Northern States; so I fled hither to the wilds of Minnesota, where I have lived in safety from my white enemies, though continually harassed by the red ones—the Indians.

"Nora, our housekeeper, and Titan, who stands accused of the murder of his master, came with us and have been true and constant friends. Shortly after our arrival in the country, we met with a kind-hearted, eccentric old hunter, who brought us into this place, and has been a noble friend ever since. That hunter is Jeduthan Turk. I know that the intended insurrection was looked upon as being treasonable and fanatical, but I said then that the people of the North who condemned our movement would some day rise up in their might and smite the oligarchy of slavery, hip and thigh. Since the advent of Sydney Graham here, in my secluded home, I have learned from him that my prediction is about to come true. Ever since the inauguration of Abraham Lincoln, as President of the United States, the South has been openly making preparations for war—to secede from the Union and build up a confederacy of the slave States. Graham thinks South Carolina will be the first to lead in the movement, as the most active operations are going on in and about Charleston harbor. But should such a rupture occur between the free and slave States, then there will be no slave-laws that the North is bound to respect, and I can openly claim the protection of the North; and what is more, *I will!*

"But this is not all my story. In Tennessee I had a deadly enemy—one of those hot-blooded Southerners who entertained no scruples of honesty, and who would take a fellow-being's life as quick as he would take a dram of liquor. He was a kind of a desperado, yet he owned a large plantation and several negroes. He finally got to gambling and lost all except one male slave. To replete his lost fortune, and at the same time satiate his spirit of hatred of myself, he resolved to win the reward offered for my arrest by hunting me up and arresting me. So he left Tennessee, unknown to a single being, and it was not long until his absence was noticed, and suspicions of his having been murdered entertained. His only slave, called Tiberius Rado, was spotted as the murderer and arrested. But, being a powerful fellow, Rado escaped from the officers and fled to the wilds of the far North-west. Here he and I met and became friends in a common cause. *To you that man is known as Titan, the Terror of the North.*"

"Tor-ments!—you don't say, gineral?"

"Yes, Titan is Tibe Rado, and his old master, whose name is Longfelt, is in this very country," continued Ames. "He is better known to you as Syl Garnett, the outlaw chief. It appears that he tracked me into this territory, but being unable to find me, he gave up the chase and organized a band of robbers, making the Indians a bulwark of defense. It is still supposed in Tennessee that he is dead, and while

I am hounded by one party, Manuel de Vasco, the detective, is on the trail of Titan, for the supposed murder of his master. But things will soon be changed, and Longfelt, *alias* Syl Garnett, will be the hounded party."

"But what has Nathan Reeve to do with all this?" asked Ben, as impatient as he was surprised.

"You see," continued Ames, "that I have a spy in the person of Jeduthan Turk, who holds the confidence and friendship of the Indians so firmly that he is permitted to go and come at pleasure among them. By this means I am enabled to know all their intended movements, and have also found out where Garnett's den is, and know pretty well all about the movements of his gang—hear me through, Ben. Among Garnett's men there is one vile traitor to you, known as Chris Proctor. Well, he took a fancy to Wilma Meredith, of Lakeside, where he usually makes his home; but Nathan Reeve stood in his way, and he finally resolved to remove him. The night of the skating carnival Proctor went there in the disguise of a Mexican *ranchero*, and provoked a quarrel with Nathan. The matter was to be adjusted the next night by a duel, but Proctor calculated that he would be the victor, for he incased almost his entire body in old armor, that belonged to Garnett, and which was worn under his Mexican garb. I heard of the intended duel, but not in time to warn Nathan of his danger. I sent Titan to see him, but he reached the lake a minute too late. The first shots were fired, and Nathan was wounded. The youth circled around on the ice and fell, not five paces from Titan, who picked him up and hurried away with him. How he arranged that trail of blood leading from where Nathan fell, to the hole in the Sauk river ice, that so deceived you, I will leave for Titan to tell you himself, and go on with the main features of my story. I have kept Nathan's existence a secret for two reasons. To let it be known would have been to expose my secret home, and bring the hounds of the law upon me. Then Nathan was so very dangerous that he could never have been moved. Through Turk I learned of the intended abduction of Miss Meredith, on the night of the carnival, by one Foss, a Garnett robber, and sent Titan there as the King of Winter to prevent the consummation of the plot. How he accomplished his purpose, you doubtless know."

"Bless me, ya-as; by shootin' the varlet right through plum-center," responded Ben, his face the picture of surprise and astonishment. "And, to be rite out with you, gineral, that man de Vasco told me that he believed Titan was his little game, and offered me a slammin' nice thing to kapter him. But, Lordy! talk of catchin' a thunderbolt. But go on, gineral; tell yer story through."

"Well, Syl Garnett has at last found out where I live. He captured my daughter the other night on the lake, but she got away from him by leaping out of the canoe upon a cake of floating ice. And that is why I have revealed to you these secrets. If there is not a war between the North and South, I'll have to hunt new quarters. But at the same time I want Garnett brought to justice."

"Then you know whar he can be found, do you?"

"I do—yes."

"Whar?—if the question's in order."

"Do you know where Father St. Ule's cabin is?"

"In course I do, when I've been his scout nigh onto two years, I have."

"Then you know where Garnett's den is," replied Ames. "Father St. Ule and Syl Garnett are one and the same person!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

RETRIBUTION.

BOWIE-KNIFE BEN was not so greatly surprised by Ames' story as the narrator and Jeduthan Turk had expected he would be. In fact, he was the most surprised at his own blindness in not having detected, long before, all that had been told him regarding Syl Garnett. For, he had seen enough the last night that he staid at the missionary's cabin to warrant grave suspicions. The absence of St. Ule and his daughter when he arrived there, and the subsequent secrets connected with the picture of the Madonna, was sufficient to confirm Ames' story in the little hunter's mind. And yet, it shocked him to the very heart, to learn that Syl Garnett had been hiding his real, villainous character under the sacerdotal robes of a missionary.

While Ames was making the above revelations to the hun-

ter, Captain Graham and the lovely daughter of the exile sauntered away across the open court and seated themselves on a large rock on the opposite side of the opening, and entered into a conversation.

During his brief sojourn at the Wolf, Sydney had declared his love for the fair Zora—a love that had grown in his heart since the hour he first saw her face reflected in the water under the ledge. His love found a reciprocal response in Zora's heart; but the maiden would not, out of the love she bore her exiled father, consent to give her hand in marriage to Sydney while her father was an exile. But now that they were about to part, both were desirous of an understanding. Each one felt that, without something to look forward to in the future, life would be a blank, and so they talked on until Nora was heard calling them to supper.

"Well, Zora," said Sydney, rising to his feet, still holding the maiden's hand, "I will soon leave the Wolf and its pleasant associations to join my companions, and before we part, I pray you will give me answer, as to whether you will or will not, in the future be my wife."

"Sydney," replied Zora, with tremulous lips, "father says if a war breaks out between the North and South on the issue of slavery, he will no longer remain an exile, for the North will not respect the demands of the South for his arrest, but give him protection. When this all comes to pass, and father is free and out of this lonely life of an exile, then will I be your wife, Sydney."

"Bless you, my darling," the young man said. "Your promise will I seal with this."

He stooped and kissed her warm, quivering lips, his whole soul enraptured with bliss. The two then returned to their friends, happier than they had ever been. A new life seemed opening to them.

After supper was over, Ben and Sydney bade the exiles an affectionate adieu, and took their departure for the camp of the amateur hunters, where they arrived shortly after dark. And never rung the forests of Minnesota with such shouts of joy, as did that one surrounding Otter Tail Lake, when Captain Graham returned alive into the midst of his friends.

That night the party, headed by Bowie-knife Ben, set out for the den of Syl Garnett. By a forced march they arrived in the vicinity of the cabin on the evening of the following day. Halting the party within ear-shot of the cabin, Ben went forward to reconnoiter the situation.

Finding no one around the place, the old hunter went fearlessly up to the door of the pretended missionary's cabin and rapped upon it. A voice bade him come in, and pulling the latch-string he opened the door and entered. No one was in the room but St. Ule and his daughter, but their faces denoted great surprise, and the guilt of their souls was plainly visible, now, to the eyes of the hitherto unsuspecting hunter.

Having addressed them in his usually familiar tone, Ben accepted a seat and entered into a conversation with St. Ule, at the same time watching him and Sybil narrowly. He also made a casual survey of the room, which wore all its usual inviting comfort and tidiness. He saw that the Madonna was in its accustomed place upon the wall, that the bedroom doors were closed, and in fact, everything wearing its usual air of sanctity.

Suddenly the hunter was startled by a human cry that seemed to issue from beneath the cabin. It was a cry of distress—an appeal for mercy!

St. Ule and Sybil started up, as though in ignorance of whence the wail came.

"Oh, father! what was that?" Sybil exclaimed, in apparent affright.

Ben turned, and opening the door, uttered a soft whistle; then, addressing St. Ule, he said:

"Guv'nor, I think thar's a tormented little ghost in your cellar."

He strode across the room and stopped, facing the picture of the Madonna. Raising his rifle, he drove the butt-end through the center of the picture, shattering its wooden support behind and making an ugly hole in the body of the Madonna, through which a dark opening was revealed.

"Ben! Ben! Trapper Ben, why this rudeness?" cried St. Ule, in great surprise.

"Hullo! who's down thar?" shouted Ben, paying no attention to St. Ule, but thrusting his head through the rent in the picture.

"Me, Ben—Wilma Meredith. I am a prisoner—help me—save me, Ben!" came up in sobs from the vault.

"Right, little girl; I'll be thar soon," he responded; then, turning to St. Ule, he continued: "This are a purty little

game you've bin playin', you ole robber, thief and sinner you; it are, I sw'ar to mortal man."

"Caught!" exclaimed St. Ule, all that hypocritical sanctity of his face relaxing into a fierce, wild look of beastly ferocity—such as a wolf will display when wounded and driven at bay.

He uttered a sharp whistle, which sounded more like a hiss, and one of the doors leading into an adjoining room was opened and three armed men rushed in. One of them was Chris Proctor.

"Seize that cussed dwarf, men!" cried St. Ule; "seize him, and knife him to the heart!"

The three made a dash at the scout, but the latter evaded them by a sudden leap. At the same instant his arm swept through the air, and a bowie-knife was driven deep into the heart of the traitor, Chris Proctor.

Then the door flew open, and Titan, the Terror of the North, who had joined the amateurs after Ben left them, rushed into the room, followed by O'Ray and the six sportsmen.

Titan and St. Ule, *alias* Dick Longfellow, met. They recognized each other at a glance. It was master and slave that stood face to face again. The time had been when the latter, powerful as he was, feared and trembled before the former. Now the master trembled and turned pale before the colossal form of the slave.

The three surviving robbers were brave and desperate men, and they resolved to die fighting, for they knew it would be death anyhow. But half a dozen pistols already covered their breasts, and the first movement they made was succeeded by the sharp report of the weapons, and every outlaw fell.

The conflict thus brought to an end, Ben hastened through the narrow door, that had been effectually concealed by the picture of the Madonna, down into the vault, where he found Wilma Meredith, trembling with a terrible fear that the robbers had defeated her friends.

The hunter conducted her from her prison, and in as brief a manner as possible she told him how she had been captured and conducted there.

The crack of a pistol in an adjoining room, suddenly startled the party. Ben rushed in and found Sybil dying from the effects of a pistol-wound inflicted by her own hand. She lived but a few minutes, but in this time confessed the sins of her father and self, and in a faintly-whispered prayer, invoked the mercy and forgiveness of God.

Thus perished the outlaws, for "Vengeance, saith the Lord, is mine."

CHAPTER XXXV.

AT LAST—AT LAST!

LAKESIDE was shocked to its center by the news of St. Ule's villainy and deception; while its joy reigned supreme over the unexpected return of Nathan Reeve, well and alive.

Wilma Meredith, however, had not been taken by surprise. Ben had given her to understand that "Natty wa'n't as dead as some people thought," and that he would soon be home to tell his own story.

De Vasco, the detective, was greatly disappointed when he learned that Tiberius Rado, the man he was after, was not a murderer. It killed his hopes of a fortune, and he soon took his departure for other quarters.

The mystery of Titan, the Terror, was at last cleared up, and people no longer lived in dread of the monster, as he was termed by the superstitious. An acquaintance with him served to diminish his size in some respects, as he had now discarded all those fearful masks and disguises that he usually wore to give him an air of unnatural terror, which, in addition to the seven feet which he stood in his moccasins, gave him an extra degree of hideousness and gigantic proportions.

Captain Graham and his party spent two weeks at Lakeside, and in this time the weekly mail brought in the startling news of the fall of Fort Sumter in Charleston harbor, and of the call of President Lincoln for seventy-five thousand volunteers. The next mail confirmed this news, when away sped Graham to Otter Tail Lake, and broke the news to Hubert Ames, the exile of the Valley of Shadows.

"I knew it would come," Ames said, thoughtfully, although he did not rejoice over the prospects of a bloody war. "The thing has been brewing for years, and now

I can take up arms and fight slavery without fear. My exile has ended, and I shall now go forth to battle for my country."

And he did. He went to Iowa where he had friends living—joined the first Iowa Regiment of Volunteers, and fell at the battle of Wilson's Creek by the side of the gallant General Lyon.

Poor Zora was then fatherless and motherless, but in her young husband, Sydney Graham, she found consolation and happiness at last.

Wilma and Nathan were eventually married and settled down into a life that was as happy and quiet as their courtship had been full of troubles and heart-sufferings.

Nora Mackarthy remained at Lakeside, for, before Ames and Zora took their departure, Larry O'Ray made love to her one day, and was promptly accepted, and forthwith they became man and wife. They live happily together, for, knowing the virtue of his wife's fist, from experience in the Valley of Shadows, Larry is inclined to favor her whims in the way that turns away wrath.

Titan, Jeduthan Turk and Bowie-knife Ben took possession of the Wolf, and within this stronghold friends are always welcome. Turk never tires of telling and laughing over his exploits with Bowie-knife Ben and Larry, especially the night he pretended he was freezing in the woods, when Ben carried him to camp and poured their brandy so freely down his throat; and the time they met in the tunnel under the snow-drift, and the night he rescued them all from the Indians in the old stone building.

The stories that Titan could tell were no less exciting, while Ben always managed to cap the climax of the whole; and it was worth a year's peaceful life to spend a week with these three men, and enjoy border life as they enjoyed it.

In the terrible Indian war, known in history as the Minnesota Massacre, that occurred two years later, these three men rendered inestimable service for the government as guides and scouts; and some day their names may be woven into history as well as romance.

THE END.

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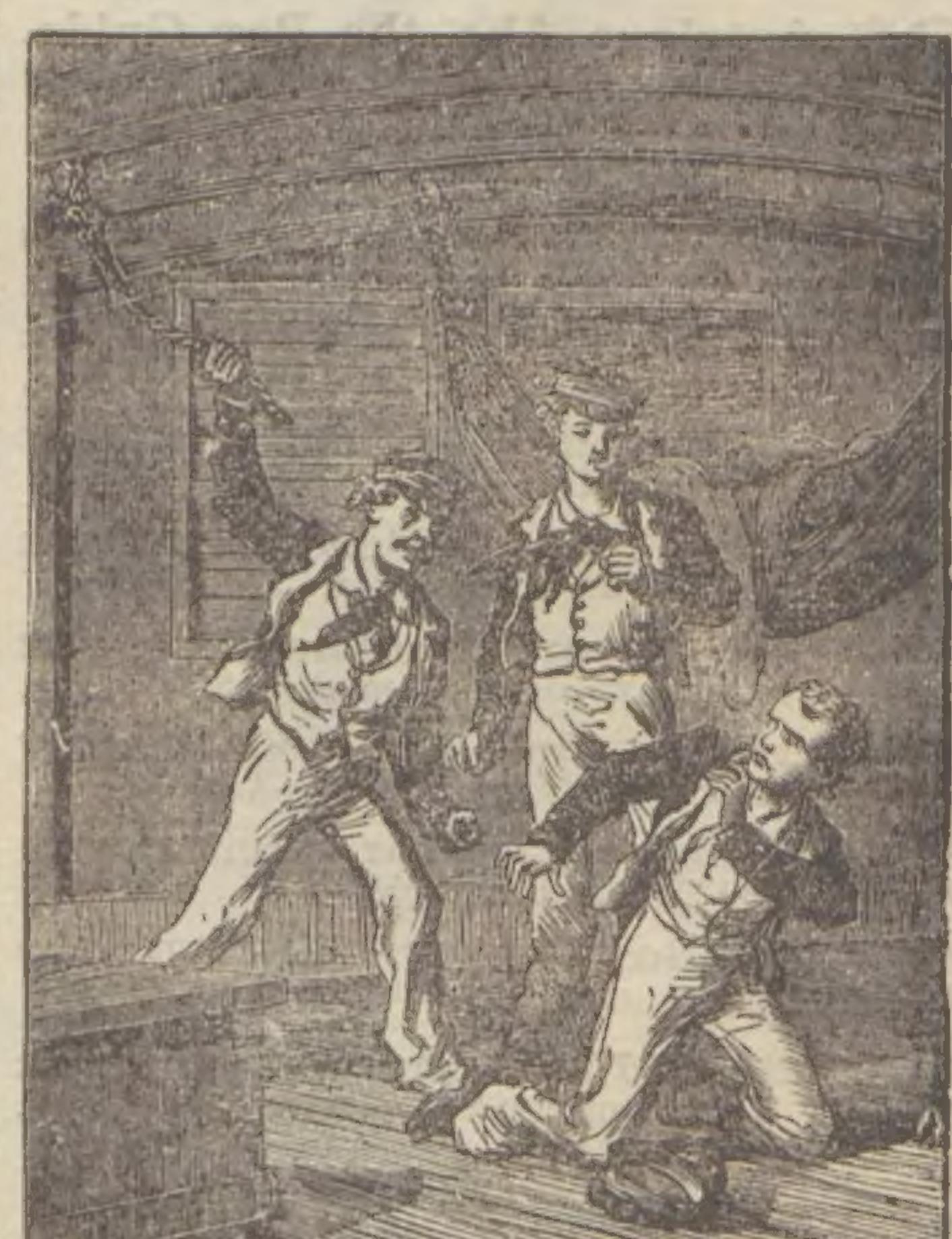


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